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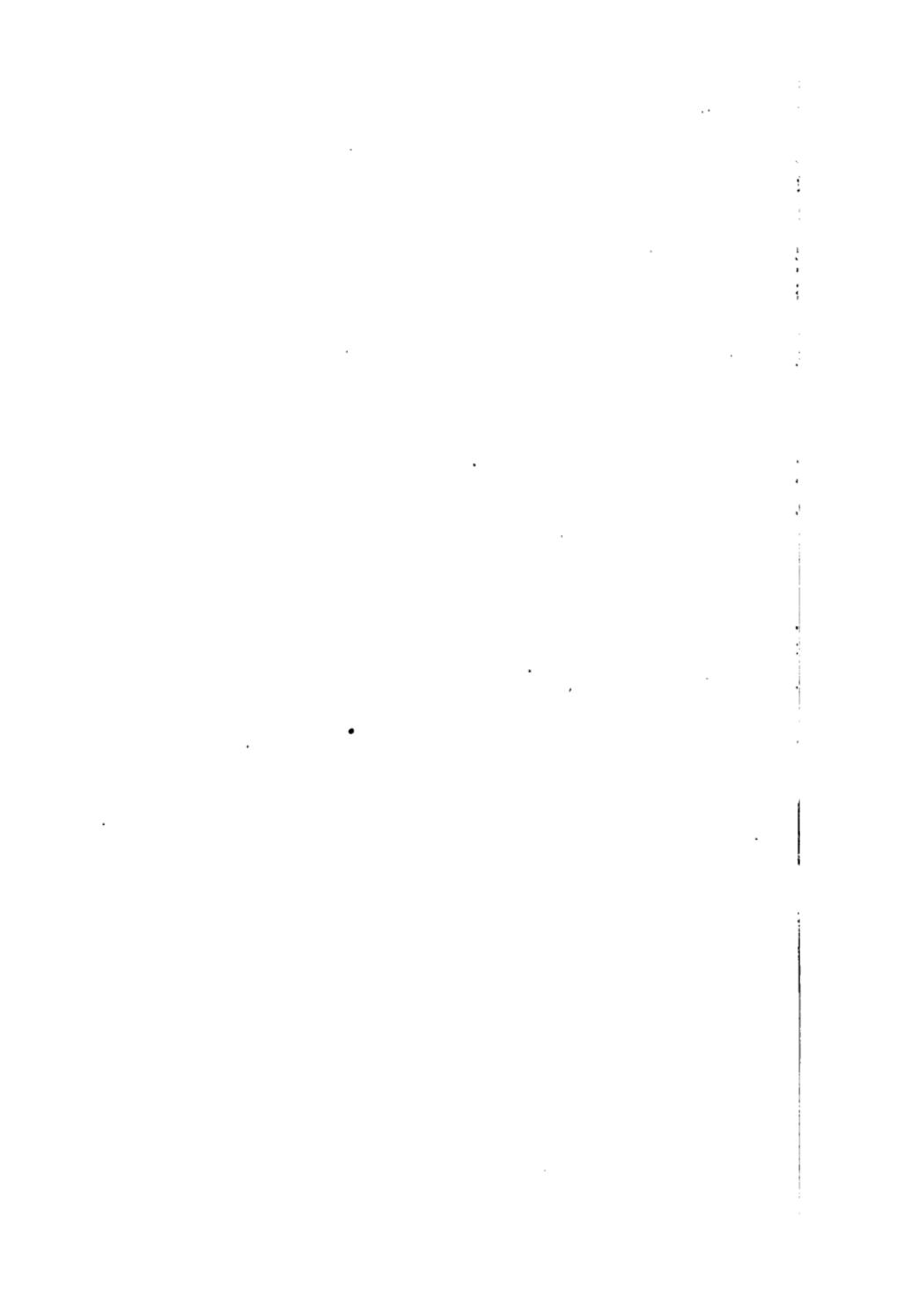


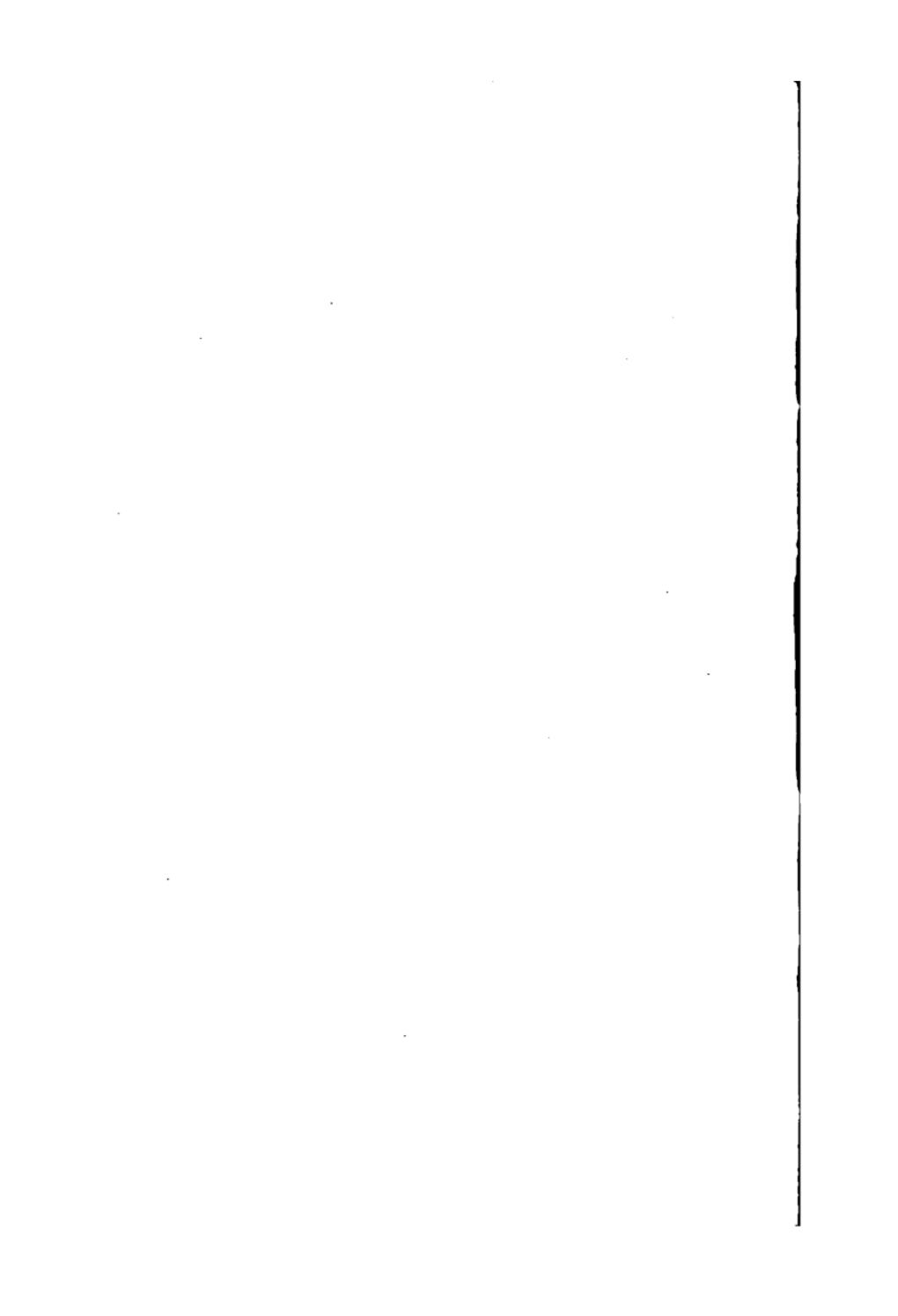
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NEW

—THURS.





THREE PETITIONS,

A TALE OF POLAND;

AND

TREVOR HALL,

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

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THREE PETITIONS.

A TALE OF POLAND.

CHAPTER I.

At the threshold of the *Dwor* (the Polish name of the great house in a country parish) were gathered, on a bright August evening in 1862, a group of peasant girls, bringing, according to Polish custom, a garland of corn and flowers to the owner of the lands on which the harvest has been concluded. To present this garland is considered a post of honor; and the peasant girls who had chosen Magda as their representative were surprised that the distinction did not seem able to remove the sadness and depression which seemed to overshadow her. "Monsieur and Madame Oksinksa came to the door to greet the new-comers, and bestow trifling presents on them.

"If I had but known, Magda," said Madame Oksinksa, "that you would have carried the garland, I should have a present ready for your mother also. She shall not lose it, however. But I have a pleasure in store for you. Look at that side door: who is there?"

"O, it is Mademoiselle Hedwige!" said Magda, clasping her hands, as a young lady, of the same age as herself, advanced towards her.

The foster-sisters (for such they were) formed a pleasing contrast: Magda with her strong frame, dark hair and eyes, and sunburnt complexion; Hedwige with her deep blue eyes, her chestnut curls, her fair complexion, and her sweet loving smile.

"Come with me," said Hedwige; and she drew Magda away with her into a quiet part of the garden.

"O Mademoiselle, how I have missed you!" said Magda. "How dull the great house was without you! and you have been such a way off; farther than Warsaw—across the sea, so M. le Curé told me."

"Yes, indeed, I have crossed the sea," replied Hedwige. "Do you know what country I have been to?"

"I was told, Mademoiselle; but it went out of my head again. It was so difficult to pronounce, and I think it was a German word."

"No, not at all," said Hedwige, smiling. "Dear Magda, I have been to England."

"To England!" said the young peasant, opening her eyes wide at the very name of this unknown country. "What a dreadful ~~land~~ why off it must be, Mademoiselle! Is it a very beautiful country?"

"O no, Magda; a country where the sun seldom shines, where there is either rain or fog almost every day; a country where they do not know our language or our prayers, where there is neither flowers nor incense, where they don't bless Our Lady's name: they neither burn candles for the dead, nor pray for them."

"O, Mademoiselle, darling, what had you to do with such Pagans then?" exclaimed the terrified Magda.

"I went there, Magda, to take my mother's place. You remember that a few years ago my brother Woldemar went to Warsaw to finish his studies, and we were so uneasy for fear the Russians should put him in prison. Well, we heard that he had escaped from Poland; and for two years we did not know what had become of him. But a year ago we received a letter. Woldemar was in England; he was married, and had a little girl. But he had caught a dangerous malady, and thought he was dying. He entreated his mother to come to him, to give her last blessing and last embrace; to make acquaintance with his wife, so soon to be a widow, and the poor little child he would leave an orphan. He entreated her also to love them, to protect them, and after his death to take them away, and give them a home and a shelter, when he should no longer be there to love and to guard them. After reading this letter my poor mother fell very ill, and the doctor absolutely forbade her to travel. She wept day and night, thinking that Woldemar would deem him-

self forgotten, and that he would die without help, consolation, or prayer. O Magda, what anguish it was to me to see my mother's heart thus slowly breaking day by day!"

"I can well believe that," said Magda. "The tears that my mother sheds continually are like a weight on my heart."

"Well," continued Hedwige, "I felt inspired with a great courage; and so I said to my mother that I was strong and courageous, capable of nursing a sick person, and of loving a little child; and then I begged her to let me go. A great many objections were raised. It was said I was too young, and not accustomed to travel; and to which I replied, that it was impossible to let my brother die alone, and that it would be easy to find some trustworthy person to travel with me; and then, if this sorrow were really to come on us, I could bring the widow and orphan back to Iglica: meanwhile, I could teach them our language, and learn to speak theirs. God's blessing was on my determination; for my

mother was comforted, and let me go. Oh, how glad I am I went! Woldemar is not dead—on the contrary, ~~mother~~ better, and both Fanny and I have nursed him carefully. Then I made such entreaties to the ambassador, and I found such assistance from old friends of my father's, that he has been pardoned, and allowed to come back to us. At this moment he is no farther off than Busk, where there are mineral waters, hoping to get quite well again there. We all came together from England, and his wife and child are here, and will always be with us. O Magda, if you had but seen my mother's joy, when she once more saw the son she had wept for! I bless God for this great joy. I should be so happy to-day, if it were not for the terrible troubles pressing on me;" and Hedwige dashed away the tears that rose to her eyes.

"Oh, what is the matter?" cried Magda, clasping her hand.

"Dear Magda, I do not murmur; God's holy will be done. But you are my companion, my foster-sister, my childhood's

friend; and I will tell you all. Come with me, and you shall see the cause of the first sorrow; and later," she added, while the color rose to her cheek, "I will tell you the second."

So saying, the young girls rose and went together to the house. Passing in, they advanced in the direction of an apartment which bore the name of the yellow room, from the color of its hangings.

"Oh, how I love that room!" said Magda; "there we laughed and played together when we were children."

"Now it is no longer ours," replied Hedwige; "it belongs to another little child; but she is alone, poor thing! and will not make much noise."

Magda followed Hedwige into the room.

"Dear Fanny," said Hedwige, "here is a new acquaintance for you, a specimen of our peasant girls. It is the harvest queen, Magda Kratch, my foster-sister and my childhood's friend. When you look at her, you will certainly think her pretty; and when you know her, I am sure you will love her."

Fanny smiled and held out her hand to Magda; but she knew so little of the language that it was with difficulty she could pronounce a few words of welcome. As to Magda, she was quite confused at the sight of this elegant creature; but her attention was instantly attracted to a lovely little child of three years old, who, sitting on the ground, was playing with a basket full of roses, and peeping up at the stranger from beneath her long eyelashes.

"Oh, the lovely little child!" cried Magda; "the little jewel! How like she is to the Infant Jesus!"

"My poor little Emma! my sweet darling!" replied Hedwige. "Speak to her, Magda."

And Magda spoke; but little Emma took no notice.

"See, Magda, she does not answer you," said Hedwige, mournfully.

"That is because she does not understand me. She would if I could speak English."

"No, Magda, she will not answer even her mother. When she cries, it is in silence;

she never cries out. Her lips only open to smile; she never laughs. She is lively, and gentle, and healthy; but we have never heard her voice. Our treasure and our darling is deaf and dumb."

"Deaf and dumb!—that angel child!" exclaimed Magda; and she saw the tears slowly creeping down the face of the young mother. "But if the Mother of God would ask her Son to give her speech!" continued Magda, looking toward an image of our Lady.

This image was well known to Hedwige and Magda; from their earliest childhood they remembered seeing the familiar figure standing out against its gilt, background, its blue mantle and red robe, the brown face marked in two places by the Tartar's arrow, and holding in its arms the tender yet Divine Child, crowned with stars, and holding forth a sceptre. It was a faithful copy of that holy image, the Virgin of Czenstochowa the Comforter of the Afflicted, the Help of Christians, the only true Queen of Poland. Before this majestic

yet sorrowful figure the two little girls had often played, and therefore Magda now turned, in obedience to some sudden impulse, toward the protectress of her infancy. Acting in accordance with the emotion of the moment, she spoke at once to the young mother, forgetting that she would not be understood.

"Here is a good Mother," she cried, "who can cure your dear little child to a certainty. Did you never pray to her, Madam?"

Fanny raised her eyes, and following the direction of the other's eyes and hand, perceived the gilded image, and sadly shook her head.

"Alas, poor Magda, you cannot console her in that way, for my sister-in-law is a Protestant," answered Hedwige with a sigh.

"A Protestant! what is that? Do you mean a heretic?" asked the country girl with a terrified glance.

"Yes, it is but too true," replied Hedwige sorrowfully.

"Oh, how unhappy they must be!" broke in Magda, sighing in her turn. "If one could only save this beautiful young lady and her dear little child! I shall say a prayer expressly every day for them now. Besides, I have got an idea in my head—but I will tell it you presently, when I have thought over it more."

"Well, well, we can talk about it as we walk," said Hedwige. "I had made up my mind to pay nurse a visit to-day; and though I have not forgotten my way, I hope you will go with me."

"With all my heart," said Magda, her eyes sparkling. "O Mademoiselle Hedwige, if you knew how delighted my mother will be!"

Hedwige took her hat and parasol.

"Let us go directly," she cried.

She pressed Fanny's hand in token of farewell, and left a long kiss upon the silent lips of the little girl. Magda accompanied her after having kissed with respectful affection the delicate hand of the mother and the dimpled fingers of the child.

CHAPTER II.

HEDWIGE had paid her visit to Kasia's hut. The old nurse had brought forward her richest cream, her freshest butter, and her ripest fruit to please her honored young lady, her darling child; she even brought out the shining copper samowar (a sort of stove or boiler for preparing the tea,) and the great table-cloth with its red-and-blue border, which only saw daylight on solemn festivals. But in spite of these holiday preparations, and of the burst of joy with which old Kasia had greeted the pretty gleaner, Hedwige did not fail to remark that the old woman's eyes were more sad and hollow than formerly, her cheeks were paler and more furrowed, and her hair more deeply streaked with gray. After having given her old nurse a handsome Indian

handkerchief and an old English cotton jacket, she left the cottage and walked for some time in silent thought. Then making up her mind to speak, she turned to her companion, and said, "I see, Magda, that your mother cannot forget."

"Forget! O no, Mademoiselle; how can you forget the greatest happiness you have had in this world—the deepest love of your heart? How can you forget that daily aching pain which changes into a dreadful dream at night, when you always see one object—the husband who loved you, and who has been torn from you, moving slowly and sorrowfully in his dark uniform, bent under the weight of his gun, or perhaps dying in the snow or in the desert sands—can you forget that, do you think?"

"Alas!" said Hedwige, sadly, "what a martyrdom is the life of a soldier's wife! How many of these hopeless, comfortless women, these widowed brides there are in these parts, who after the sorrowful farewell is spoken never receive word or line,

who pray and weep all day long, and yet who never see the end of their five-and-twenty years' separation!"

"I know it, Mademoiselle," said Magda; "but there is none of them who prays as much and who weeps as bitterly as my mother. She was left an orphan, you know; when quite a child, and my father Maciej was every thing to her—her cousin, her friend, he protector, and her support; indeed he loved her as much and took as much care of her as a mother; so when they were betrothed she gave him her whole heart, and when she married him she swore to live only for him—to die, if it were needful, for his sake. She has often said to me, 'Magda, when he was with me, this hut was a heaven on earth; and when you were born it was just like a little angel coming into it to make us even happier than before.' But, Mademoiselle, the Russians seem to like disturbing poor people who love each other. They seem to pick out the kindest of fathers and the tenderest of husbands on purpose, because

they say that these good men make the best and most obedient soldiers."

"Yes, dear Magda, that is perhaps true; for if your father had been less brave and compassionate, and had not acted as guide to those poor banished fugitives, the Russians might not have noticed him and he might have been living at home free and happy."

"But, Mademoiselle, he could not have refused without doing wrong. Can a good Catholic refuse to stretch out his hand to save his brethren? Something at my heart tells me that, whatever my father may have suffered, he does not repent having given help to his countrymen in their distress; nor does my mother, in spite of her sorrow regret it either."

"O, if my father could have done anything," said Hedwige, "you know, Magda, he would have given four other men or a sum of money to have save poor Maciej. But it was in 1846, after the massacres of Galicia, and my mother told me he was

compromised on account of his connection with the emigrants; so all his efforts did harm instead of good, and Maciej was forced to go."

"To his death," continued the peasant-girl, finishing the sentence. "O, if I only knew that it was a quick and easy death, which is soon over! But you must have heard, Mademoiselle, how a soldier is treated for the least fault—a slight forgetfulness, perhaps. He is punished, degraded, and cruelly flogged; then they throw his clothes over his bleeding skin and make him follow the rest, carrying his arms and his knapsack across his poor back. When he is sick or wounded, though he does not want food then, they are saving of their medicines; and if they think him too ill to be moved, they leave him on the field or outside the camp to suffer alone in his weakness or despair, till he is killed by the heat of the sun or buried under the snow, or till the wolves come—"

"O, hush, Magda; these are horrible

pictures," cried the young lady, hiding her face in her hands.

"Now, Mademoiselle, you understand why my mother has never had a day nor an hour of joy these sixteen years; this is why I have heard her say so often when she prays for my father, 'O my God, if it is not Thy will that he should return to me, take him to Thyself rather than let him suffer longer.'"

"It is rather true there is so little hope," said Hedwige.

"Very little certainly; but at the beginning of the year we did hear something which gave us a little. A poor soldier who had finished his twenty-five years' service passed through Iglica, on his way to his village on the other side of Warsaw. A soldier who has served his time is a rare thing. He had left home young, strong, and robust; he was returning old, invalided, and broken-down, all in rags, and with but one leg; and when they told him that my mother's husband was in the army of the Caucasus, he asked if he was a

Catholic, and what his name was. Then he said that he had known one Maciej, who came, he thought, from these parts; and that he had left him in the hospital at Tiflis. That made us hope a little; but you know, Mademoiselle, what a common name Maciej is amongst Polish peasants. Your mother wrote to Tiflis for us; but perhaps he is dead, for we got no answer. That is why you found my mother looking older, and so sad and pale."

"Yes; it is terrible to have lost all hopes," said Hedwige with deep sadness.

"But, Mademoiselle, we ought always to hope in the goodness of Almighty God; but life is long, and heaven is so far away."

"And the distance between earth and heaven is a weary solitary one," continued Hedwige, mournfully.

"O Mademoiselle, how sadly you speak! surely *you* ought to be happy. You have good parents: you have just found your brother; you can have nothing to grieve you, unless it is the affliction of that little darling."

"I told you before, Magda, that I have two reasons for my sadness," answered Hedwige.

"So you did," cried Magda; "and all this while I have been telling you my troubles and letting you grieve alone. O my dearest Mademoiselle, open your heart to me, will you not? Let us share our sorrows together; perhaps that will make them seem less."

"Only God can help me, my good Magda; for He alone can change the heart."

The village-girl sighed compassionately. She took Hedwige's little hand, and said tenderly:

"You never kept a secret from me, Mademoiselle; you will tell me this too. But perhaps I can guess it. Are you not grieving about Monsieur Ladislas?"

Hedwige did not answer, but raised her large eyes to her young friend's face; their bright blue was dimmed by large tears, which quivered on the darkly fringed lids, and then rolled down the delicate cheeks,

to which the name of Ladislas had brought a vivid blush.

"It is a long time since he has been at Iglica," continued the peasant girl; "but I am sure, Mademoiselle, that his heart is yours still, and that he thinks of no one else; for if once one loves you, one can never forget you—I know that well."

"What does his loving me still matter, so long as he does not love God?" said Hedwige, gravely. "Ladislas is not now my betrothed of early days, my childhood's playfellow, so simple, trusting, and pure; he is not what he was when, full of joy, I gave him my ring, when I hoped to love him all my life. He had no strength to resist the world,—he has given himself up to all its seductions; and every step he takes leads him farther from me, farther from God."

"Can it really be so?" cried Magda, joining her hands. "But, Mademoiselle, he seemed to love you so much."

"Perhaps he thought so once, and found out his mistake afterwards; or perhaps he

did love me really, and then met with other things that he loved better than me. It is long ago since we exchanged rings in our little village church, where I vowed to wait for him and to love him always. He went away soon afterwards. When he saw other countries, his ideas began to change from mine, and perhaps he began to desire another love than mine also."

"Is that really true?" persisted Magda.
"Does he not write? will he never come back here?"

"Yes, Magda; he writes still, and he will come back, but it will not be the same Ladislas that I loved. You do not know, dear, what he has been about; and I am sure that mamma has not told even me half his faults; but I have heard that he is deeply in debt, and has wasted his inheritance; that his friends are worthless young men of no principle, without honor and without religion, that he passes his days in gambling; and that he has already fought two duels; he was wounded in one, in the other he killed his opponent."

"It is dreadful," cried Magda; "but you love him still. I cannot understand how you do."

Hedwige was silent for a moment, and the tears ran down her cheeks; but she continued in a calm and gentle voice: "My mother advised me to give him up altogether; and that is not the worst, dear Magda, for I could not expect to make him happy now that he is so changed. I could bear to be separated from him here, if I could look forward to meeting him in heaven. O, I used to dream of our going through life hand-in-hand, and think that even death itself would have no terrors for us, but that we should be eternally united above, to continue our blissful hymn, which has been only interrupted for a moment below. I could have renounced my betrothed and my hopes of happiness here, but I cannot bear that he should tarnish his honorable name and lose the esteem of his friends; it is worse still to think of him shut out from heaven, where, purified from all stain, we meet to

live and to love for all eternity. O my God, is there no sacrifice that I can make to secure his eternal salvation, to obtain Thy grace and Thy forgiveness?" cried Hedwige, raising her tearful eyes to the golden sky, which the setting sun was already deepening with its purple shades. As she paused, her hands fell listlessly in her lap; but Magda, taking one within her own, pressed it tenderly, and sat down at her young mistress's feet.

"What is the use of our being young," said the peasant girl, after a moment's silence, "if we are not happy? You *demoiselle*, weep for your lover. I cannot forget my father; and that poor young lady, too, who will never hear the voice of her sweet little child,—she too is sorrowful."

"Yes, indeed, Magda, we are three wounded hearts, three sisters who suffer in secret. Yes, our wounds lie deeper; but we must not murmur,—it is from God they come."

"Then God can heal them," continued the young villager; "He often sends His children bitter trials, but they do not last forever. Suppose we were to pray; suppose we were to make a vow to our Blessed Lady—to our Lady of Czenstochowa. Could not our Lady, if she wished, make the child speak; convert your betrothed, and send my father home? But then we must deserve her protection,—we must be humble and confiding; and when we approach her altar our prayers must be full of love, poured out from the bottom of our hearts."

"Perhaps you are right, Magda," said Hedwige thoughtfully.

"Yes, indeed I am: our Lady is so good. Do not you remember how ill we both were once, when we were quite little things; and how we were taken to her altar and blessed? We wore her colors four or five years; but your dresses were of silk and muslin, while mine were only stuff. Then we grew so rosy and fat, our mothers were overjoyed; they had done nothing but cry about us

before. Ah, our Lady has not forgotten us; and she will do something for us again, I am sure."

"Well," said Hedwige, "I will tell you what we will do. I will ask my mother's leave, and as soon as the harvest is over we will go to Czenstochowa."

"How delightful to go with you!" cried Magda; "how I long to see this wonderful place, and the shining image of our Lady! But we must not go alone; we must take the little child, or at least her mother."

"But, dear Magda, I told you my sister did not believe in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin or the Saints."

"O yes, she will believe if we talk to her nicely about it," replied Magda, confidently. "Sick people go to all the doctors they can hear of; unhappy people ask prayers from every one, just in the same way. How can a good mother here doubt the kindness of our Mother in heaven? Speak to Madame Woldemar, Mademoiselle, and you will see."

"At all events I will try," said Hedwige, rising. "Come with me to the house, and I will try and find her at once."

The two young girls took a narrow path across the fields, and entered the garden of the manor. The moon was rising above the clouds and lighting up the dark shadows of the lime-tree avenue. At one window a lamp was burning behind the white curtains—it was in little Emma's nursery.

"She is asleep," said Hedwige; "let us go in gently, not to wake her."

They found the child in her little bed; one dimpled hand lying outside, the other under her golden head; her eyes closed, her smiling mouth half opened. By her side sat the young mother, who was bending over her treasure with glances in which love was mingled with sorrow, though from time to time she occupied herself with the open Bible she held in her hand.

"It is only Magda and I," said Hedwige softly, as she entered. "We have been talking about making a little expedition together; and we want to know, dear Fanny, if you would join us."

The young mother shook her head sorrowfully, as she raised her eyes.

"But if it was to do your child good?" continued Hedwige.

"How could it do that?" cried the other, quickly.

"Listen, dear Fanny; but believe me, I do not wish to hurt your feelings or to speak against your religion—I only want to tell you what we believe here;" and Hedwige, coming close to her sister-in-law, told her in her own language all that wonderful history of the Virgin Mother, who for ages had poured forth blessings, miracles, and graces upon her clients from her altar at Czenstochowa. "Can you think it wrong or useless to invoke her aid for Emma? Many others before you have come to her in sorrow and tears; they have gone far away full of hope, and returned again to bless, full of joy and gratitude. I am going, too, to pray for the salvation of one I loved,—whom I love still. Magda is going to pray for her father's return; why should you not ask for the cure of your little girl? I know that would be a miracle; but, Fanny, if our Lord has loved His Mother so much as to give her a throne

beside Him in heaven, can He not give her power also to bless children and to console mothers?"

While Hedwige spoke, Magda prayed in silence. Neither words nor prayers were fruitless. Fanny replied as she closed the Bible:

"God can do what he pleases. I will go with you to Czenstochowa and offer Him my child."

"O my darling little Emma," cried Hedwige, joyfully kissing the tiny rosy fingers, "if we could only cure you!"

"We cannot, but our Lady can," said Magda, casting a bright glance towards her favorite image.

"And now, good night Magda," cried Hedwige, embracing her. "Remember, we set out on Tuesday next, provided my parents give me leave."

"Without fail, Mademoiselle. I will go and tell my mother the good news," cried the peasant girl.

A few minutes more and she had vanished between the dark shady trees of the long avenue.

CHAPTER III.

THE country bordering on Silesian Prussia and Mazovia is in general poorly inhabited and ill-cultivated; it consists for the most part of a large sandy district thinly sprinkled with dark fir-trees; but nearer the Warta it assumes a more verdant and fruitful appearance; the wide river winds between fields of wheat and barley, grassy meads and shady woods, and round a gentle eminence crowned by battlements and lofty towers surmounted by a shining cross.

Every faithful son of Poland, as soon as he catches sight of these distant gray walls, makes the sign of the cross and utters a short prayer; for this is the venerated shrine of the Queen of Poland, the Virgin of *Czenstochowa* ("the frequent preserver,"

according to the literal translation of the word.) It is a shrine frequented not alone by the inhabitants of the country ; but as soon as the snow melts and the roads are passable, from Whitsuntide to All Saints, pilgrims make their way thither from the Lithuanian forests, from the Pomeranian marshes, from the busy towns of Moravia and Silesia, and even from the mountains of far-distant Bohemia itself. Whole villages come together, walking in procession, headed generally by an aged priest, bearing their gay banners floating before them, and singing hymns and litanies to beguile the way. They met with much hospitality on the journey—our Lady's pilgrims are rarely ill received ; and once arrived at their destination, the church and monastery, give them a warm welcome.

One of these long cavalcades was proceeding, one August day in the year 1862, along the avenue leading from the old town to the foot of the monastery. It was chiefly composed of bronzed but robust peasants, roughly clad in their usual brown garb

and brown sandals; but a few persons of a better class brought up the rear, who traveled in little basket carriages, drawn by small lean ponies, whose manes and tails bore traces of their dusty journey.

Suddenly a larger vehicle, of no very fashionable make, but roomy and comfortable, drew on one side to allow the procession to pass; and at the same moment the golden head of the English child and the sweet face of Hedwige Oksinkska appeared at one of the windows. The young girl had called the child's attention to the crowd of pilgrims; and the little thing looked around with eager curiosity, smiling at the devices painted on the floating banners, stretching out her tiny hands towards the silver cross carried aloft, but still without uttering a word or cry.

This was an evident discouragement to the young mother, who was besides greatly fatigued by the journey. She said in a mournful voice to Hedwige: "These poor people seem to come from a distance."

"Yes, a long way," replied her sister.

"I think, to judge from their costume, they are from the province of Augustowa, which lies to the north, towards Warsaw."

"But are they not afraid of traveling in such hot weather?" continued the young Englishwoman.

"Afraid! no; on the contrary, they are rejoiced to make the pilgrimage. A journey to Czenstochowa is not only a present happiness; it is something to remember for life. They have hurried over their harvest, and put by what little money they could, in order to come here; and whatever fatigue or trouble they have met with on the way is all forgotten as soon as they see the distant spires of the church."

"And are they whole villages who travel together?" asked the lady again.

"Generally a pilgrimage is formed of a whole village," replied Hedwige; but they are obliged to leave some of the inhabitants behind—young mothers who cannot leave their little ones, old people, and the sick who cannot leave their beds. But the good pilgrims do not forget them, for all that;

they carry with them the wants and the sorrows of their absent brethren, and will not forget to give them a share in their prayers here, and on their return blessed rosaries and images of our Lady of Czenstochowa."

Fanny Oksinkska was silent, and looked with some interest at the procession as it passed. She had often seen as large a concourse in her own country, but never going on such an errand, or headed by a priest: her countrymen flocked to races, cricket-matches, regattas, or a popular election; not to churches or shrines, to put up petitions to God and to His Mother. "Why were they so different?" she asked herself. Whilst she was still buried in reflection, and the other inmates occupied in silent prayer, they reached the farthest end of the avenue, and dismounted on the smooth turf, which extended to the foot of the fortress. Here the ditch, the drawbridge, and the turrets of the surrounding wall almost hid the church and the adjacent monastery, and gave the spectator the impression that it was a citadel that lay before him.

Fanny Oksinkska looked around curiously.

"It cannot be a convent; it is surely a fortress?" said she, inquiringly.

"It is a convent surrounded by a fortress, because it contains so precious a treasure," replied Hedwige with some dignity. "Every thing that is great, holy, and venerated has its enemies; and so has our Queen. A long while ago the miraculous image, then in the possession of a Mazovian noble, was struck by two Tartar arrows, which had no sooner touched it than they rebounded towards the miscreant who had directed their flight, in token of Divine vengeance. Since then the image has been placed upon this height, which commands the plain, and surrounded by all these war-like precautions, for other foes followed the Tartars. These were not Mohammedans, but Lutherans; Swedes who coveted the possession of the holy enclosure."

"But the Swedes were surely not as barbarous as the Turks?" said her sister-in-law.

"Not as barbarous, perhaps, but quite as avaricious," replied Hedwige. "They had heard of the riches the church contained; of the gold remonstrance set in diamonds, the reliquaries garnished with emeralds and cameos, the ruby and sapphire crowns, the stoles and chasubles embroidered with gold and gems, with which the piety of Casimer, Jagellons, princes palettes, and our Queen Hedwige had, during successive ages, enriched the shrine. Besides, Fanny, at that time, as you know, zealous Protestants broke images and pillaged churches."

Her sister-in-law made a sign of assent.

"Happily," continued Hedwige, "the ramparts of the monastery were as solid as the walls of a fortress, and the monks as valiant and courageous as any soldiers. The Prior Kordecki, till then known only as a wise and humble religious, showed himself in the day of danger a great captain. He left his stall in choir, and directed the movements and operations of his men.

Still wearing his habit, he tore down the ladders of the enemy, repulsed attacks, disconcerted assaults; only pausing for a moment to kiss the blessed image hanging around his neck, or to cast a glance, in which both confidence and humility were mingled, upon the gold cross which shines above us, and which seemed to say also to him, 'By this thou shalt conquer.' And thus strengthened for the conflict, he would turn again to confront his foes, and to encourage his little band, calling out to his monks with confidence, 'Fight to-day; to-morrow our Lady will save us!"

"And did she save them?" asked Fanny, anxiously.

"Yes, she did. After many dangers the news came one festival-day that our General Czawiecki was advancing to chastise the insolent Swedes; and the enemy at once raised the siege, greatly ashamed that so small an obstacle had so long resisted their arms with such success. And so Kordecki acquired the warrior's crown; and in a few minutes we shall see his

statue on the ramparts, and his austere, gentle face will be the first to greet us from its old oak frame at the bottom of the first corridor."

The two ladies had by this time ascended the hill, followed by Magda, who carried little Emma in her arms. They crossed a draw-bridge, and entered, through a huge turret-gate, a narrow passage between the two walls, which led directly to the church. Here they met a large company of beggars, for the most part old and infirm, who held out their hands for charity, as they muttered Litanies and Hail Mary's. These poor creatures not forgotten, our pilgrims continued their way, till they found themselves actually in the church of the monastery. Fanny, unaccustomed to such a sight in the dreary, cold-looking buildings consecrated to the worship of God in her own land, would willingly have lingered here to gaze at the walls covered with mosaic work, at the splendid altar supported by enormous marble statues, and at the shining silver lamps hang-

ing from the dome; but her two companions only paused here for a momentary prayer, and she was obliged to follow them with the rest of the crowd towards the left nave, where they suddenly stopped before a door of black marble. From within proceeded the distant strains of the organ, mingled with the voices of the worshippers, and the light fumes of the incense. All at once the marble folding-doors opened: some priests appeared in the full magnificence of their sacerdotal splendor. They caught sight of an empty space, dimly seen through the mantling incense, and half-lighted by the reflection of waxen tapers; they crossed the white-marble threshold, and found themselves before the throne of the Queen of Poland, the Virgin of Czenstochowa.

It was strange that of all that multitude none seemed employed in examining the rich details and varied beauties of the building; neither the inlaid pavement, the storied roof, nor the numberless tombs, images, and pictures attracted any atten-

tion. The eyes of our three pilgrims, like those of all the rest, were turned towards the distant high altar, about which were concentrated the richest treasures of the shrine, and fixed upon a pale blue curtain, which hung down from above. Here knelt an aged monk, who was reciting aloud the Litany of Loretto; the others making the responses, with voices in which fervor was often interrupted by emotion, to the accompaniment of a sweet and low-toned organ.

As the priest uttered the words, "Comforter of the afflicted, pray for us," the blue curtain fell, every head bowed, and a deep sigh burst from every bosom. The grave, sorrowful portrait of our Lady, painted upon cedar-wood by Saint Luke himself, was before them, surrounded by ex-votos of gold, pearls, and sparkling gems, and crowned by a diadem of precious stones dazzling with brilliancy. The marks of the arrows of her Tartar assailants were still visible in the brown thin

cheeks. She seemed to be presenting her delicate little Jesus to the assembled spectators; her Child's head as well her own being crowned by a circlet of diamonds and rubies. There are triumphant Virgins; there are young Madonnas of Raphael, full of joy and happiness; there are Virgins of the Immaculate Conception, and Virgins of the Seven Dolors. Our Lady of Czenstochowa belongs to these last, though her grief is veiled by a deep calmness and her features are unchanged. She still carries her bitter sorrow in silence; she is not here our Lady of Victories, but our Lady of Pity. In the quivering taper-light her eyes seem to melt and her lips to move at the sight of her kneeling suppliants; at least so thought Magda, as with extended arms and uplifted gaze she poured forth her heartfelt petitions, broken by sobs.

"O blessed Virgin," she cried, "who saw your Son die, wilt thou not bring back my father? O Mother, I pray for my mother! O Queen of Virgins, wilt

thou accept me, if I consecrate myself to thee?"

She, as well as several other pilgrims who had made a similar vow, went completely round the altar on her knees, disappearing behind it for a few minutes, and then reappearing in the same posture of humiliation, with joined hands and an expression of the deepest recollection.

Hedwige prayed silently, kneeling on the pavement, her heart full, her head buried in her hands.

"O Mother," she sighed, "do I not ask too much? I pray for a soul entangled in the trammels of the world; for his repentance and for his final salvation. Should Ladislas obtain a heavenly crown, it matters nothing to me should I forfeit a bridal one below. He is my beloved and my betrothed for time and eternity; but I would willingly give my life to gain for him: it would cost me nothing to give him up to God." She stopped for a moment to look at Fanny, whose lips were moving and her eyes glistening, as if she too would pray.

The young Protestant had looked around at first with no other feeling than that of curiosity; but gradually she began to experience a certain emotion from the unexpected sight around her. The example of numbers, all engaged in earnest supplication, was contagious, and evoked a spark of that faith which lies dormant in every soul. A voice within seemed to say, "Behold, and listen to this kneeling crowd: each one has his secret sorrow to be assuaged, some favor that he desires to obtain. And thou who hast thy grief and thy desire also, why canst thou not share in their hope? Thinkest thou that thou art wiser than they; and that thou standest in no need of prayer?" And the sweet-faced image of our Lady of Czenstochowa seemed to add its encouraging words also: "I myself have been a mother; I too suffered and wept over my Child."

As Fanny heard these two voices appealing to her heart, she involuntarily joined Emma's little hands and raised them toward the shrine, and in weeping accents spoke as if she were herself the

dumb child for whom she prayed. "Queen and Mother, aid me!" she cried; "warm my infant heart, open my mute lips and my sealed ears: may your name be the first word my lisping voice utters!"

Fanny trembled as she spoke; she could hardly understand what mysterious impulse had dictated her petition; but she felt that the Virgin had heard it, and that she could not retract the species of promise she had made in her child's name.

When the service was over and the crowd had slowly dispersed, our three pilgrims found themselves once more in the courtyard of the convent.

"Our promises are made; our prayers are ended," said Hedwige, extending her hands to her companions.

"May they be granted!" said Fanny, sorrowfully.

"They will be, if it please God," cried Magda with eager hope. "But, Madam, our good Mother must have time to speak and pray for us. We are not holy enough to deserve to have direct miracles worked for us at once."

"But unless our wishes are granted at once, it will be no miracle at all," said the young English-woman mournfully.

"Whether it be a miracle or not, it will be a favor all the same," said Magda earnestly. "All that is good comes from God: but His times are not ours. I have promised our Lady to wait and pray a full year, from now till the Feast of the Assumption; so for a whole twelvemonth I shall still hope to see my father safe at home."

"Well, we will wait a year," said Hedwige; "we are young, and God is great. And Emma is very little too," she continued, taking the child in her arms, and caressing her tenderly, while Fanny looked on with tearful eyes.

As they went down the green hillside together, Magda took the young mother's hand and pointed toward the spire of the chapel. "The day will come," she said, "when you will weep no more, Madam; thanks to our Lady of Czenstochowa."

Fanny made no other answer than a mournful sigh.

CHAPTER IV.

TIT was the middle of the month of June, 1863, and all was bustle and confusion in the little town of B—, on the frontiers of Volhynia; the inhabitants of which were almost all Catholics, and consequently devoted to the Polish cause. Powder manufactories and forges were every where at work; nothing was heard but patriotic songs, nothing seen but drilling, marching, and counter-marching: even the women were busy making linen, and filling the knapsacks of the young recruits just upon the point of setting out. But beyond the immediate confines of the town the peasants were schismatics, and their assistance very doubtful; whilst it was of great moment to gain them over,

or at least to secure their neutrality, though at the same time a difficult and dangerous matter, requiring boldness, intrepidity, and caution in the undertaking. The young leader of the insurgents, Ladislas Korda, possessed these qualities in perfection: he had distinguished himself in the early part of the insurrection by a singularly brilliant retreat and was the idol of his soldiers: though his moral character was not of the highest order, and his strongest admirers confessed that he drank as much as a Swiss, gambled as if he were a Russian, and swore like a Turk.

The first care of the young officer was to collect all the information possible; and it was in the pursuance of this duty that, on the day on which our story re-opens, he sat impatiently waiting to question a stranger who was to be brought before him. Ladislas was barely eight-and-twenty; he was rather slight, but actively made; his features handsome and regular, and lighted up by expressive dark blue eyes. But there were slight shadows be-

neath the lids of those fine eyes, and scarcely perceptible furrows on that fair brow, which were not due to labors in field or camp, but rather to late hours and consequent dissipation.

The stranger, who made his approach slowly, bending his uncovered head as he advanced, was an elderly man with but one arm, clothed in rags. He had once been vigorous and robust, but he was now bowed down by want and sickness, and his features half hidden by a mass of ill-kept gray hair. Ladislas Korda frowned slightly as his eye fell upon the tattered Russian uniform of the new-comer.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, sharply.

"From Tiflis, captain. I am an old soldier, sent home from the regiment sick and wounded," said the man, casting a glance of surprise at the sash and spurs of his interrogator, and instantly divining his rank.

"From Tiflis, you say? That is a great distance; and you look too weak to have

come so far. Mind you speak the truth, or I will have you shot."

"I have often been near death, but I never told a lie," replied the old man, calmly.

"That's well. Now, supposing we let you go, which way would you take next?"

"To my village,—Iglica,—captain."

"I know several villages of that name; which?"

"It is a long way off, in the province of Radom; and the chief owner there is the Count Oksinksa."

"Iglica,—Oksinksa," repeated the young officer with some surprise; "then what is your name?"

"Maciej Kratck. I worked on the estate, but the government ordered me away; and I have been sixteen years in the army."

"Maciej Kratck! There was one of that name greatly regretted by my relation, Count Oksinksa, I think. Yes; husband of his daughter's nurse,—Made-moiselle Hedwige," continued Korda, trying to collect his scattered recollections.

"O Captain, since you know them, tell me is my wife Kaisa still alive?" cried the old soldier, falling on his knees, his eyes full of tears.

"My good fellow, I cannot say. I used to stay pretty often at Iglica once, but I have not been there these three years," replied the captain, blushing a little as he spoke. "But I think I remember, just before I went away, Mademoiselle Hedwige spoke of her nurse. Yes: and she showed me her foster sister—a fine handsome creature, not one to be forgotten in a hurry."

"My dear little Magda,—the child I hardly knew!" exclaimed the father in a trembling voice.

"But, my good man, since you know them all at Iglica, you ought surely to have known me. Sixteen years ago I was often at my uncle's, when I was a mischievous young rogue fresh from school."

"Why, you must be little Ladislas Wojtko; the fine young master that was always playing with our young lady. It was pretty to see you running in the fields to-

gether; and every one said that one day you would be husband and wife."

"Yes, you are right enough; I am Ladislas Wojtko, the little master; and I once hoped to be the husband of Mademoiselle Hedwige; but man proposes and Fate disposes,—Mademoiselle Hedwige is Mademoiselle Hedwige, and I am here."

"It is the will of God," said the old man, rather to himself than to Ladislas.

"As you like; but I think the devil has had a hand in it, for my part," said the young officer with a careless laugh. "But, come, no more chattering; show me your traveling pass. Well, it's all right,—you may go on when you please; but," he added, after an instant's pause, "since you are going to Iglica, will you take a message from me?"

The soldier bowed respectfully.

"I will give it you this evening, then, for I must have time to write it. You can stay with us till then to rest,—I have an hour to spare; and I want to ask you about your campaign in the Caucasus. How did you get on there, so far away from your

wife and the little child you seem so fond of?"'

"I was like a poor bird torn from the nest,—a body without a soul; if I had not believed in God I think I should have ended my sorrows with a ball from my gun; but as I was a Christian, I knew it would be a sin, and that it would be better to live uprightly and suffer patiently."

"Patiently! That must have been rather difficult. What on earth did you do in those barracks of yours?—more like wolves' caves than any thing else, I should think."

"I tried to do my duty; to obey my superiors; to clean my arms properly. Then I prayed to God, and thought of my country."

"Very moral, truly; but hardly amusing. You have not always been an invalid, my good fellow; you must have been fresh and active sixteen years ago. Did it never come into your head to set up as a colonist and make a new family for yourself? I dare say you could have got leave, and taken to wife a fair Circassian instead of your old Kaisa. You must have seen what beauties those are."

"I had no eyes and no heart for any beauty; *my* eyes and heart were at Iglica. I never looked at the mountains covered with snow, nor the flat plains through which we passed; I saw nothing all the while but my poor wooden cabin."

"Constancy, indeed! But how you must have suffered, my good fellow!" exclaimed Ladislas, with rather a forced laugh. "How you must have hated your officers! I wonder you never thought of revenge."

"No, captain," replied Maciej, gravely; "for revenge is forbidden by the Gospel. However, perhaps I might have forgotten that, if I had not met with an old priest, an exile, who brought me back to my duty; and, thanks to him, I learned to act like a Christian."

"What do you mean by acting like a Christian?" asked Ladislas.

"Why," said the old man, reddening a little, "once my colonel, a regular Russian, out on a skirmishing party, fell down in a faint in the snow. The rest of his men wanted to leave him to freeze till the day of judgment; but I recollect that the

priest had said, 'Never desert an enemy in his need;' so I picked up the colonel, and carried him home on my back."

"Well," said Korda, "you were rewarded?"

"Yes, with eight dozen from the cat-o-nine-tails: ordered by my major for having left the ranks without leave."

"And your wretch of a colonel allowed of it?"

"O, they had served me out before he was able to speak. When he was well again, and heard of it, he sent me a rouble, and called it salve to cure my cuts."

"That comes of doing good to such sort of creatures. You deserved what you got," cried Ladislas, laughing.

"I did it to please God; not to be rewarded by man," said Maciej with a certain pride. "I was not discouraged; it was in helping my major on his horse again in battle that my left arm was taken off by a ball."

"A regular Christian hero," cried Ladislas, with another laugh; "I see my message to Iglica is in the safest possible

hands. One more question, my good fellow; have you seen any military preparations on your way here?"

"No," said the old soldier; "I have seen none. The country is like a desert; all the cabins closed."

"Indeed! but can I take your word?" said Ladislas.

"It is as I say; I am no liar," continued Maciej, quietly. "And now that I have answered all your questions, let me ask one little one; what regiment do you belong to?—for I can see with half an eye that you belong to the army too."

Ladislas laughed alone; then he went on, rather more seriously than usual:

"You are right, my man. I am a colonel in the National Army. I take my orders from Variovia, not from St. Petersburg; I have haymakers for my soldiers, Russians for my enemies; and here is our flag," he continued, raising his lance and displaying a little red square, on which appeared a white eagle with claws and wings extended; "you poor Caucasian campaigners know nothing of all this."

But our country is coming to life; our eagle is ready to fly; and we are going to fight for ourselves and for you, so that no more mothers may lose their sons."

Maciej's pale face lighted up, and his eyes sparkled as he heard.

"It is a glorious cause," he said at last; "if I were ten years younger I would go with you; but I am old and weary now, and I have lost an arm; but since I cannot help you otherwise, Count Ladislas, let me give you one piece of advice; it can do you no harm, at all events. If I were you I would carry a cross for my standard instead of a lance. God must march with you; for you can only conquer by Him."

"I do not know whether God marches with us or not," replied Korda, carelessly; "perhaps He is represented by His ministers, for we have plenty of priests. You talk the Bible, my old Maciej; but—what on earth is the matter, Julian? he cried hastily, as a young officer entered suddenly; his dress in disorder, and consternation on his countenance.

"Colonel," cried the young man, "a

sentinel placed to reconnoitre has just brought very important news," he added in a lower voice: "there is a gathering of peasants a couple of miles off; most of them armed with sticks, hatches, scythes, and old guns; but no one can tell on what side they are,—whether for or against us."

"They are coming—that is well," cried Ladislas, rising; "we shall soon learn their intentions." He advanced to the door, and gave his orders on the threshold. "To horse, without a moment's delay."

All was in motion directly; the troops flew to arms, formed in rank, and prepared to march; the officers mounted, Ladislas at their head: in five minutes more they were defiling through the town. The young colonel, before his departure, called Maciej and said: "You see I am prevented writing that message; but probably all will be well, and I will give it you when I come back; so, mind, do not leave till I return."

The old soldier bowed his assent, and sat down upon a stone to watch the departure of the column, which marched toward the country, in the direction of which

the sentinel had spoken. They had not gone twenty minutes' distance when they came up with the band of peasants—assembled in much greater numbers than themselves, and roughly armed—advancing silently, and with no Russian uniforms amongst them; a good sign in the opinion of the insurgents. Ladislas gave his men the order to stop when within fifty paces of the others, and galloped forward with only two attendants, taking off his cap and lowering his sword as he approached.

"So, my good friends," he cried, calmly, and confidently, "you are come to join us; you know that we have taken up arms in your cause as well as in our own. We want liberty for all; and we are your brothers, not your masters."

There was no reply for some moments. At length one of the foremost peasants said in a grave voice: "First tell us who you are; we do not know you."

"We are your brothers of Poland, who would rescue you from Russian despotism: we are guiltless, and persecuted by sanguinary tyrants: we ask the aid of your

arms. If you will not join us, at least do not think ill of us. Let us pass through your territory to attack the Russians, and we will hurt none of you; we are soldiers, not robbers."

" You mean insurgents, rebels, and thieves," cried the spokesman. " You dare to rise against the Czar, our father; you insult our religion, and despise our popes. Ah, you would like to trample us in the dust as you used to do; but that is over now: we have a protector now, the Czar, who will give us land, liberty, and gold. We are grateful to him, and are sworn to serve him, and to give your heads should he ask them."

" You are deceived, friends," continued Ladislas, firmly; " it is we who can give you the liberty and the gold that have been promised you, the lands that you call yours: we shall only take to give them you again; we will swear it on your own cross, since you do not acknowledge ours."

" We do not believe you—you rebels are liars; we are here for our father, the Czar. Back, back!"

"Let us pass, fellows!" cried the young colonel, whose eyes began to flame, though he still contained himself. "Let us pass; we do not wish to use force, if we can help it."

"Force, indeed! Force is on our side," replied the peasant, mockingly. He made a sign to his band; and in a moment every arm was raised, brandishing sticks, and axes, pikes, and even great stones.

The insurgents began to lose patience, and some amongst them shouldered their carbines.

"Do not fire," cried Korda. "We must not kill them,—they are our brothers; but forward; over them if they will not give way; they will see we do not fear them."

He spurred on his horse. His officers did the same. The insurgent column wavered, and the next moment was assailed by a hailstorm of stones, varied by a shower of balls from several rusty guns; and surrounded by a gathering circle it was impossible to break. The horses began to bleed from terrible wounds inflicted by scythes and pikes; but the peasants, who

seemed to wish to spare their riders, cried aloud :

“ Let us take the rebels alive ; let us take them prisoners for the Czar, our father ! ”

Korda defended himself bravely for a long while. His horse, animated by the conflict, reared furiously, trying to bite any of his master’s enemies who came within his reach ; but at last a pike inflicted a deadly wound on the noble animal, who fell lifeless on the ground, his rider under him.

The young colonel was instantly surrounded and disarmed. A few seconds sufficed to bind him upon one of the wagons belonging to the peasant band ; most of his men were prisoners like himself, several dead or wounded ; the rest were in full flight across the neighboring fields.

The victors marshalled their captives before them ; and proceeded towards the little town, which the Polish insurgents had left full of hope and confidence scarcely two hours before. The poor inhabitants, struck with consternation, gave up their arms at once, and implored mercy.

As Korda, still bound in the joisting wagon, entered the principal street, he caught sight of old Maciej.

"There is no message," cried the young colonel in a loud voice; "but it is no matter. Go on, my good fellow, to Iglica, and tell them what you have seen."

As he spoke, he looked upwards; his guards, thinking he had lost his reason, had no idea whom he addressed.

No one troubled the old soldier. As soon as the procession had passed, he rose from the stone where he was seated; and making the sign of the cross, pursued his homeward way.




CHAPTER V.


 LITTLE heir was born to the Ok-sinkska family ; and the old and young couple were equally delighted by the new arrival. But the mother had been seriously ill, and her convalescence was slow ; and consequently Hedwige watched over little Emma, the sweet little dumb child, in her stead, and tended her with the most loving devotion.

One fine evening towards the middle of July the young aunt and her little niece, seated on a mossy bank in the garden, were busily making garlands of periwinkles. Alas, there had been no change in little Emma since her pilgrimage to Czenstochowa ; no word or cry had ever escaped her lips. It is true that Magda—who had never doubted the possible success of the expedition—had thought of an ingenious

plan "to help our Lady," as she said in her simplicity; it consisted in very frequently repeating in the child's presence some of the most common and easy words, using peculiar emphasis, and touching at the same time the objects she mentioned.

For instance, every evening, as she entered the yellow room, she would point to the familiar image, in its blue tunic and red mantle, shining against its gold background, and say to the child, slowly and distinctly, "Mary!" She would make little Emma touch young Madam Oksinks'a's blooming cheek with her dimpled fingers, as she smilingly repeated the word "Mother;" then perhaps she would take the vase of flowers from the chimney-piece, and making the child smell, she would say, "Roses, daises, lilies." Hedwige highly approved of this idea of her humble friend, and had adopted it herself in great measure. This very evening, as the shades of night were gathering around, she had made her little niece raise her eyes above the tall lime-tree tops, and repeated to her, as she

pointed, "Stars, sky, night!" But Emma, always attentive, only fixed her blue eyes on the heavens, and seemed quite insensible to the sweet voice at her side. Soon Hedwige sadly ceased her vain endeavors; and pressing the dumb child to her heart, let her play as she liked with the fruit and flowers in her lap.

Suddenly she thought she heard some one calling her at the other end of the garden: she listened. Hurried steps came nearer and nearer. There was a sound of panting sobs; and she next caught sight of Magda's white apron and blue petticoat at the end of the avenue.

"What is the matter?" she cried.

"O my dear young lady," exclaimed Magda, as she ran toward her, "do not be frightened; I am not crying with grief. It is our Blessed Lady's doing,—our Lady of Czenstochowa."

"Then some good news has come for your mother!" cried Hedwige.

"It is my father—my father himself; this evening, two hours ago. He is resting in our cabin."

"Thanks be to God! Here is a favor granted," cried Hedwige, with a grateful sigh.

"O Mademoiselle, I did not know my poor father. He has lost an arm; he looks so weak and old, and he went away strong and well at thirty-four. But he saw me first. This was how it was; I went, two hours ago, to the well for water; I was coming back, with my jug on my shoulder, when I saw an old man in a torn, gray coat, walking so slowly, for his poor feet were bound up in rags. He was looking about sadly, with tears in his eyes, and I saw that he was trembling all over. I thought perhaps he was thirsty, so I stopped and said: 'My poor man, you are tired; come and sit down by the well to rest; let me give you a good draught of fresh water.' 'Thank you, my good girl,' said he; 'I am not thirsty. Tell me, is this Iglica?' 'Yes,' I replied; 'the village of Count Oksinksa.' Then he said: 'How these trees have grown in those seventeen years! Does Kasia Kratck live here still?' and I said yes, and that

she was my mother. But my poor father would not let me finish. He put his hand on my shoulder, and looked fixedly at me. 'So, my child, you are really mine! the darling little Magda that I have seen every day, so delicate and tiny! just as she was when I went away!' Then I cried out, and fell on his neck; and we both shed so many tears that it was a long time before we could leave the well-side to seek my mother. Then I had to prepare her. It would not have done to have told her at once; but joy does not kill. She cried a great deal at first, too; but it did her good. Then she clasped my father in her arms, and began to thank our Lady."

"Well, one of our prayers at least has been answered," said Hedwige.

"And who knows that the others will not be answered too?" replied Magda. "And now I must tell you something, Mademoiselle. I did not come to tell you only about my father; he has brought a message—for you—from a long way off."

"For me! and from whom?" cried the astonished girl.

"From Monsieur Ladislas," said Magda, hesitatingly, and lowering her eyes.

"How can it be? Your father knew him, then? Where did he see him?"

"On his road,—a long way off, he said."

"But, Magda," said Hedwige, reflecting, "Ladislas has so long followed a way so different from mine, his errors have been so great, that I cannot think of him as the companion of my future life any more; and, therefore, perhaps, I ought not to receive his message."

"Then, Mademoiselle," said Magda, sorrowfully, "my father had better give it you when you are with your parents; but though it may grieve you, I do not think you will be dispeased by it."

"Very well," replied Hedwige! "go and tell your father. I will go and look for mine."

An hour after, the old soldier appeared before Count Oksinkska; and, after his first respectful greeting to his former master, refused to answer any questions till he had fulfilled his commission. Then, turning

to Hedwige, he said in a grave, almost fatherly tone:

" My dear, sweet young lady, forgive me if I am about to grieve you. Have hope and confidence: when we despair, God is often pleased to show mercy."

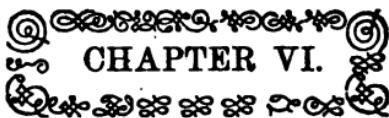
Then he related, whilst the others listened in silence, how he had met the young colonel just on the point of starting off at the head of the insurgents; how, before they had struck a blow, they had been attacked by a formidable band of peasants devoted to the Czar, and dispersed; that Ladislas had been taken prisoner, and that he had seen him carried past him captive and defeated, but still apparently calm and resigned. He repeated his very words, to console the young betrothed: " Go on to Iglica, and tell them what you have seen."

Whilst he spoke, the father and mother never took their eyes from Hedwige's face. She was pale; but neither sigh nor tear escaped her. When Maciej finished, she turned toward the large crucifix above the count's desk, and said in a firm and gentle voice, and with outstretched hand:

"My betrothed had given himself up to his passions and to the world, my Jesus; but now he only belongs to Thee and to his executioners. I had rather it were so, because Thou art merciful, O my God; and if all earthly voices were silenced, Thou canst still speak to him in the depths of his prison."

After these words she left the room; and the others, respecting her faith and piety, looked after her with a sort of veneration




 CHAPTER VI.


AYS and weeks passed without bringing any news of Ladislas. The Count Oksinksa made all possible inquiries, and undertook a journey himself. Various rumors were afloat; but nothing was learned with any certainty, beyond the fact that he was still alive and a prisoner.

What a life for the poor young man!—formerly the fashionable frequenter of every haunt of gaiety, the ornament of London and Paris drawing-rooms. The old count and his wife, as they thought of it, shook their heads and became grave.

Hedwige was less disturbed than her parents. “Since his misfortunes,” she said one day, “I doubt no longer, and I hope.” She was hoping still when August came,

that bright joyous harvest time. It was the first morning of the month, and little Emma, who had seen the great wagons set forth to the corn-fields, was all impatience to go to see what was to be seen. The young aunt accordingly tied on the child's broad straw hat; and mounted on one of the high wagons, they were soon making their way to the scene of action, when they saw a britzka, one of the little carriages of the country, coming toward them, drawn by two small gray ponies, which were known to all the country round as belonging to the Bernardian monastery near, in which the begging brother made his rounds.

When the country was more flourishing the expeditions of good Father Pacomius were numerous and successful. He would sit smiling in his little conveyance, giving his blessing to the passers by, surrounded by sacks of flour, pots of honey, and barrels of beer, his brisk steeds going at a trotting pace; only turning his head sometimes to see if the flock of sheep behind

were following in order, obedient to their leader's little bell.

But since the insurrectionary war, the expeditions of Father Pacomius, who was a man of great courage, talent, and presence of mind, had been generally of a very different and less pleasant nature, demanding the exercise of all the great qualities of which he was possessed.

As the two vehicles came close together, Hedwige told the driver to stop; and, making the sign of the cross, saluted the monk with the words:

“Praised be Jesus Christ.”

“For ever and ever,” was the answer.

Little Emma knew the good monk, and smilingly held out her hand toward his long beard.

“I am glad to meet you, Mademoiselle,” said the father, rising from his seat, “for I was just on my way to Iglica.”

“My father and mother will be very glad to meet you. I was going to take my niece into the corn-field; but we have not gone far; shall I go back with you?”

“If you please, my child; I cannot stay

long; and, besides, I have a letter and a message for you."

"A letter!" repeated Hedwige. She glanced at the monk's face, and saw that all its habitual freshness and vivacity had vanished. It was tanned, and had a worn, weary look. There was an expression of sadness, too, which he seemed desirous of hiding. She forebore to question him in the presence of the drivers; but she gave orders to return, and in ten minutes they were at home. The first salutations were hardly exchanged, and the cup of coffee barely tasted by the visitor, when he turned toward his guests and said, with all the cheerfulness he was able to master:

"It is a long time since I have seen you, my children. I have been on a distant journey—almost to Volhynia."

"Indeed!" said the Count Oksinksza, with much apparent interest.

"Yes: our Prior sent me to our brothers, at Luck, on some business. I was delayed some time on the road—the country was disturbed; I was in the little town of

B——, just as the council of war was being held there."

"Ah!" cried Hedwige and her mother together, perceiving that the old man was at some loss how to proceed.

"But that would not have kept me long; for such matters are nothing to us; but some one was condemned to death—a fine, handsome young gentleman, the leader of the insurgents."

The mother did not dare to speak this time. It was Hedwige that broke the silence.

"O father!" she cried, seizing the monk's hand, "tell me, was it *he*?"

The old priest's firmness forsook him at this appeal.

"Alas! it was," he replied in a faltering voice. "And it was I who prepared him for death; I who once hoped to have seen your marriage, to have sat at your wedding-feast, and to have visited you often at your home."

Hedwige felt her strength fail her. She sat down, and hid her face for an instant; she slowly raised it, pale and tearless.

"You said, father, you prepared him for death," she continued; "did he die penitent? had he made his peace with God?"

"He died like a good Catholic, like a true son of the Church; his sins were confessed humbly and sorrowfully, his sufferings accepted as a salutary and meritorious sacrifice in the sight of God."

"And how did he lose his life?" asked Hedwige's father.

"He was shot," replied the monk in a low voice.

"That was well. He died a soldier's death," said the count.

"He died a Christian's death; that is better, father, said Hedwige, recovering a little, and rising from her seat.

"You frighten me, my poor child, you are so calm," said the monk; "I had rather you shed tears. Shall I speak of him? Perhaps it will comfort you to hear of his last hours; at least it may, perhaps, make you weep."

"Tell me all, father," said Hedwige; "but do not think I suffer not because I

do not weep. I had lost Ladislas, and I wept much; but I have found him again now—the companion of my childhood—my betrothed."

The monk looked at her with tenderness and respect; he placed his hands upon the young head that so bravely bore the martyr's crown, and began:

"As soon as Ladislas knew his sentence he asked for a priest; and as his execution was fixed for the day following, the request was granted without much difficulty. I had just entered the town when I was summoned on this sad mission. I accepted it with still greater zeal when I learned the name of the prisoner. I had heard of the sad errors of his latter years, and I thought what a blessing it would be to reconcile this poor sinner to God. I hardly knew the worn, wounded captive who greeted me as I entered his cell, he was so changed since I had seen him riding on horseback, or running after butterflies with Mdm'lle Hedwige; but in spite of his pallor and his sadness there was an expression in his eyes that pleased me; something neither

bravado nor despair; but which told of a penitent heart about to meet its Judge; but which hopes also to find a Father. He smiled, and held out his hand, and was still more pleased when he found out who I was, and remembered that he had often sat upon my knee. ‘God desires that I should die repentant and at peace,’ he said; ‘that is why He has sent you to me. You will tell Hedwige Oksinska so when you see her. Do you know that to her I owe yesterday my repentance, to-day my peace, and to-morrow perhaps my eternal happiness? Do not be astonished at what I am about to say,—every road leads to God when the hour of grace has struck. Yesterday, after my condemnation, I was here alone, when I thought of dividing amongst my friends the few trifles I now possess, when my eyes fell—could it be by chance?—upon this ring which I always wore. My thoughts flew back to the donor, Hedwige, far away from the troubled days that separated us, to those when I loved her alone; when I was good because she was good, and when I too prayed night and morning to our

Lady, nothing ashamed to kneel by her side. A light suddenly seemed to pierce through my soul, and I saw that since those happy days I had been a blind and miserable wanderer; and I seemed to hear a voice which said: "Thou mayest again be happy, not upon this earth where thou hast sinned, where thou hast made thyself unworthy of Hedwige, but above, in eternity, where reign Hope, Love, and Forgiveness." I thought it was a mother's voice, and in my ring I seemed to see our Lady's smiling face. It was the first ray of daybreak; then came more light, then full dawn, and at last the sun. All night I wept, sought, and struggled, and in the morning I asked for a priest."

"Blessed art thou, O Mother, thou hast saved him," cried Hedwige, turning to our Lady's shining image fixed against the wall.

"Even so, my child; the grace of God left little for me to do. I heard his confession, I gave him absolution; but there was no need for me to strengthen him against the fear of death: he saw it ap-

proach with less dread than I; but I instructed him to offer to God the last regrets and last sufferings of the life that was so early to be cut short. I told him that no price is too great for eternal bliss, and that the least of the rewards above is worth any sacrifice here. He seemed convinced, and to regret nothing—not even you, my child, because he felt certain of being with you in heaven for ever. He walked to the place of execution without being moved by sympathy, acclamations, or even insults. He bid adieu, through me, to his friends, and to you; and fell at the first volley of balls, speaking, to the last, of God and his country. I do not bring his ring, which was buried with him, according to his wish; but he begged me to give you this letter."

It contained these words:

"Do you still remember me, Hedwige? Doubtless you know that long ago I forgot God and the friends of my youth; that I have fallen into numberless errors, and have become unworthy of you; but God had mercy on me—misfortune has brought me back to Him. Is not returning to Him

returning to you ? It is true, we are about to be parted here ; that the shades of death are gathering round me ; but death purifies though it separates. If I had seen you again in this world, I should not have dared to offer you the hand of the spendthrift, the gambler, and duelist ; but perhaps my blood may cleanse it, so that when we meet above, I may give it you with love and confidence.

“ Your friend and betrothed,

“ LADISLAS.”

Hedwige read this letter without giving way ; she kissed it, and let her first tears fall upon the paper ; she then carried it off in silence, to keep as a precious treasure, which called her to a meeting for eternity. The next day she appeared in mourning ; but despite her pale face and black garments there was hope and calmness in her expression. Beside her widow's dress, she began to wear a small medal of our Lady, fastened round her neck by a blue ribbon ; and when Fanny asked her some time afterward why it never left her, she replied : “ I must fulfill my vow : our Lady has done her part ; I must do mine.”

CHAPTER VII.

THUS two prayers had been heard: one, that of the poor young mother, remained unanswered—so, at least, she thought, as she sat in her chamber on the Vigil of the Assumption. It was late; the curtains were drawn, and the night-lamp burning. She had just hushed her noisy little son to sleep in her arms with her singing; he was any thing but dumb, the mischievous fellow: very handsome, and like his father; yet it was her other child that Fanny loved best. Mothers always give the largest share of their hearts to the most frail and suffering of their little flock; to the one who gives them the most wakeful nights, and the most cause for tears. So Fanny cast a loving glance toward Emma's little crib, whilst she still rocked

the infant on her knee. "Sleep, my darling," she said; "you are all mine; your look tells me more than words can do. I do not need to hear your voice to read your eyes. You will never understand others, but you will always understand me; yet, my poor little one, what would become of you if you lost me? O, grant me a long life, my God, for her sake."

She lost herself for a while in musings, partly sweet, partly sorrowful; she long wept and sorrowed by the child's crib, saying to herself that all hope was gone, and thinking of that terrible chapter in the Bible in which God asked the life of Isaac from the patriarch father: it came into her mind that God asked a sacrifice from her too, never to hear her child's voice; and day had almost dawned before she sought her pillow.

Hedwige and Magda came very early to dress little Emma, for the Assumption was a great day at Iglica. A sheaf of wheat, tied up with flowers and ribbons, was offered at our Lady's altar; and the statue of the Blessed Virgin in Hedwige's room draped with lace, and adorned with lighted

tapers, white roses, and tiger lilies. Emma was greatly charmed with the sight; and her mother, though still sad and downcast, went with her child into her sister-in-law's chamber without any particular emotion. But when she suddenly caught sight of the fair white statue shining before her amidst its brilliant array of lights, sweet-smelling flowers, and green leaves, the sanctuary of Czenstochowa came before her, and she thought of the tears and prayers poured forth at that mysterious shrine.

"Many petitions had perchance been granted there," she said in the bitterness of her heart; "but alas, O Mother," she cried, taking little Emma's hand as she advanced toward the altar, "I entreated thee in vain. I hoped a Mother would have pitied me. From Heaven alone I expected my child's cure: have I not suffered enough to draw down a blessing on her?"

Meanwhile little Emma stood motionless, her lips half open, her eyes raised and fixed upon her mother, as if she wanted to hear by the look, instead of by the ear.

"How I would have blessed thee hadst thou heard me!" continued the poor mother. "God would have saved her; she should have belonged to Him. I should not have been jealous, for it is for herself I love her. She should have lisped your praises, grown in your faith, O Queen, O Mother, O Mary!"

Through the stillness of the room came a vague, uncertain sound, almost like the echo of a distant breeze, repeating the name, "Mary."

The three women looked at each other, then at the child.

"Was it you that spoke, my angel?" cried Fanny, throwing herself on her knees and infolding the little one, whose eyes were still raised, and whose lips still quivered. "Hedwige, did we hear aright? can it be?"

Her companions could not answer; they scarcely dared to believe their ears.

"Do you hear me, darling?" continued the mother. "If you hear me, if you love me, if you can speak again, open your lips for one word; call me mamma."

The child's lips formed into a smile ; she laid her dimpled hand on her mother's cheek, opened with some effort her rosy mouth, and murmured, "Mamma," in the same sweet hesitating voice they had before heard.

With a cry of joy, Fanny seized the little one and pressed her to her heart. Nothing was heard for some time but sobs, and the murmuring sounds of Magda's voice repeating the *Magnificat* in thanksgiving.

At length Fanny raised her head, and stretching out her hands to the altar, exclaimed in trembling accents :

"Thou hast saved my child, O Mary : from henceforth she is thine ; she shall know thee ; love thee, invoke thee all her life ; wilt thou also accept the mother with the child ? These two sisters have taught us to pray to thee ; there shall be no difference between us now ; we will pray to thee together."

After this wonderful event there reigned great peace and union amongst the family at Iglica. Little Emma learned to speak

better and better every day ; at first she only knew a few words, but how sweet and joyous they sounded in the ears of those who loved her ! As her ideas grew, so did her limited vocabulary ; and the delight of her parents knew no bounds when at last she could repeat with ease the three first answers in the Catechism.

On one fine evening of the following spring, Hedwige and Magda were walking together in the great avenue, talking over little Emma's wonderful progress.

" How pleased her grandpapa was yesterday," said Hedwige, " when she came to him with the little verses she had learned for his feast ! "

" I should think he was indeed," said the young peasant ; " who would have believed that we should ever hear that little angel's voice ! What a miracle of Almighty God ! "

" How thankful we must be !" continued Hedwige. " Fanny too is more than we could have hoped ; since her conversion she seems more my sister than before, and I love her still better. She has faithfully

kept her promise; when shall we think of ours? Will you tell me, dear, what you promised Our Lady of Czenstochowa?"

"I promised to belong to her if she brought my father back," replied the young girl. "I do not mean to marry, and I will try to take care of little children and help the poor; but I do not like to leave my parents, who are old and feeble."

"That is just what I promised too," said Hedwige. "I never loved any one but Ladislas, and all my earthly hopes are buried with him. I promised to consecrate myself to Our Lady if she would save his soul; but during my father and mother's life I will not leave them; they would think it cruel. Only our parents are very old, Magda; shall I tell you what we will do when they are no more? We will go to Czenstochowa together."

"To Czenstochowa?" repeated the village girl, astonished.

"Yes, Magda; there is a poor humble convent there belonging to the Mariavites, the daughters of Mary. They pass all the

time when they do not spend in invoking their Mother, in teaching poor children to read, write, and sew. There we will go; there we will labor; and there we will grow old, dearest. All our life and every hour of it will be too short to thank our Lady for all her favors."

"So you will take me with you, darling young mistress?" said Magda, smiling.

"Certainly," replied Hedwige. "There will be no difference between us there; we shall be like the rest in the convent,—really sisters."

"Amen!" said Magda, pressing her companion's hand; and thus they walked on together, still talking in a low voice, till the evening breeze arose, and the pale rays of the moon began to shine through the lime-branches of the avenue; and so it seemed they would henceforth go together through life.



TREVOR HALL.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS.

CHRISTMAS! Merry Christmas!
Welcome again, thou hoary-headed guest; welcome, with thy snowy mantle clasped tightly around thee, and thy brow wreathed with a chaplet of holly and mistletoe; welcome, with thy cheerful face and kindly smile. Sad hearts have longed for thee; old friends stand ready to greet thee; the young rejoice and the old feel young again. Many an aged head, long bent beneath the weight of care, rises gladly to welcome

thee; many a wearied heart, long chilled
and frozen by the world's coldness, warms
again with the buoyancy of youth at thy
approach.

Christmas, thy very name's a song,
Telling of olden times,
Of all that passed in those ages long,
Since first from heavenly climes,
Bright angels brought to the mourning earth
The tidings glad of a Saviour's birth.

Thy name recalling pictures bright,
Of happy hearts and home,
Of loving faces glowing with light,
And soft, low musical tones.
Whose echoes, lingering, circle the heart
With memories Death cannot sever or part.

It is Christmas, and the bright-eyed
child feels happier, yet knows not why; a
vision of plum-pudding, mince pies, Santa
Claus in all his mystery, and Christmas
gifts, makes his little heart dance with joy;

It is Christmas, and the young maiden feels a glow of her childhood, as she sees through the vista of holly, "the mistletoe bough," and the Christmas tree; and there is a magic in the former, that brings a summer's smile into the fair face. It is Christmas, and the old man lifts up his head, and oh! what a vision comes to him. Childhood, boyhood, and manhood sweep over him in a dream; his dead mother's hand is once more upon his brow; the fair young girl he wooed, and won—and lost, the bright, glad children, that made his home a paradise—all stand round his Christmas hearth, their shadows making its darkness bright. Christmas is a sunbeam sent from God, to melt the cold hearts grown old and callous in the world's ways. Dear reader, if you are young, rejoice in this happy time; rejoice ere the world has destroyed the freshness and fairness of your life; sing the praises of the Babe of Bethlehem; join in the glorious carols that sound His praise. And ye, who are aged

and weary, rejoice ; open your hearts ; join even as when children you joined in singing "Glory be to God on high." Ah ! as your lips utter the words, you remember how in your childhood, you listened with loving wonder, to the sweet old story of the Chaldean shepherds, of the bright star over the stable, of the three kings from the East, and of Jesus, the God-Babe, born for you on that cold Christmas night. And fancy shows you again, as it showed you then, the golden stars in the deep blue sky, earth wrapped in its white robe, and the shepherds keeping their watch by night. You can almost see the heavens open, and the angels of the Lord descending, singing : "Glory be to God on high." It shows you the poor stable, with Joseph and Mary, and the little Babe, with its hands outstretched to you. And oh ! though you may have wandered from God, though you may have sunk deep in sin and misery, though the faith of your childhood may have been neglected and almost lost, those little hands

are outstretched still, those loving, infant eyes are turned to you with the same sweet patient smile. Can you refuse them? Ah, no! If there be a lingering love of God in your hearts, if there be one memory of your holy faith left, if there be one recollection of your sinless, happy childhood, go with loving contrition to the feet of God's minister, and there welcome to your hearts the Babe of Bethlehem.





CHAPTER II.

TREVOR HALL.



IT was Christmas-eve, and the world's mighty hearts throbbed with fresh light and vigor; but nowhere was the glorious festival more warmly welcomed than in the mansion of Lord Trevor. Trevor Hall was situated in one of the northern counties of England, and a stately building it was. It had been first erected by Sir William de Trevor, who came over with the Conqueror, and when one part had crumbled away with age, another was added. Almost every style of architecture was in consequence employed, and the

result was a picturesque mixture of the modern with the olden times. Here an old gray tower, covered with ivy, reminded you of the days of the Crusaders; a stately entrance, a long, broad flight of marble steps, a grand hall, supported by fancifully carved pillars, brought you down to Queen Elizabeth's time; and again the large, magnificently furnished drawing-rooms, the exquisite little boudoirs and the noble library belonged to the nineteenth century. The park was famed for its graceful deer, its silvery lakes, and its noble old oaks, and the pleasure grounds for their rich and varied mixture of fruit and flowers.

Nobly in times of war and persecution had the Trevors held their faith. Death, exile, torture, and disgrace, had been the lot of successive owners of that proud mansion; but through all they had bravely battled, and it was with a thankful heart Lord Bernard Trevor saw the glorious faith once more rearing its head in Old England.

Trevor was not a large town, but most of the inhabitants were Catholics. Lord Trevor had built a beautiful little chapel, and had liberally endowed both church and school. Early in life the earl had married a noble Catholic lady, and for many years he had hoped and prayed for a son and heir. Two daughters were born, and then a boy, but scarce had they rejoiced over his birth than they wept over his death. And thus the Ladies Winifred and Agnes became the sole heiresses of their father's noble name and vast fortunes.

The Lady Winifred was several years older than her sister. She was a beautiful girl. The nobility of her race spoke in every feature. You read it on the pale lofty brow; in the dark flashing eyes; in the chiselled features; in the haughtily curved lip; and in the graceful, though stately figure. She looked a high-born, high-bred lady—and such she was. Agnes was most unlike her sister, but quite

as beautiful. One inherited her father's proud, aristocratic bearing and features, the other her mother's delicate loveliness and grace.

Oh, that I had a poet-pen to tell you the glories of that Christmas-eve! The snow lay deep upon the ground; it hung in thick fringes on the trees; it covered the clustering ivy; and it looked so fair and pure, one could almost wish it always there. It was a bright, cold, clear, frosty night: the earth shone under the golden stars glowing in the deep blue sky. The moonbeams lay like gleams of silver on the snow: they sparkled in the icicles that drooped like diamonds from the branches and the eves. But inside the mansion, oh! there was Christmas. Every room was decorated with evergreens, until the house seemed like a grand forest; the red berries peeped from the green holly: the mystic mistletoe twined with the laurel, and fir wreathed around the walls and picture-frames. It made

one's heart glad to see those beautiful rooms.

One drawing-room was more profusely decorated than any other, for there stood the Christmas-tree. It was a fine fir-tree from the park, and most beautiful its dark green branches looked with the glittering tapers; the golden oranges, the purple grapes, and the gay streaming ribbons. Such treasures hung from that tree! Books, pictures, medals, jewels, toys and costly rosaries—every thing that could be wished for was there: it seemed to have come from fairy land, so brilliant and beautiful was that Christmas-tree. The door was softly opened, and Lady Agnes gently entered the room. Looking cautiously around and seeing no one, she quickly advanced, and placed a bracelet of brilliants for her sister on one of the drooping branches.



CHAPTER III.

LADY WINIFRED'S SECRET.

DEAR reader, will you go back three years with me? When the eldest daughter of Trevor was only seventeen, she met Aubrey Howard, the only son of a noble and wealthy gentleman whose country-seat was near Trevor Hall. The acquaintance soon ripened into love, and love increased until it became something like worship.

Aubrey was equal to Winifred in birth, fortune, and education, and he had no doubt, when he applied to the earl for permission to address her, that he could ob-

tain his consent. But to his great surprise and still greater grief, his proposals were quietly but firmly refused.

"But surely, Lord Trevor, you will tell me why? you will give me some reason? It is cruel—pardon the expression—to tell me only this."

"I will tell you, Aubrey. Believe me, I suffer as much pain as I inflict, for you are as dear to me as one of my own children; but Winifred's hand is not at my disposal, nor at her's: she has been betrothed from her infancy."

"And to whom, may I ask, my lord?" said Aubrey.

"To Sir Wilfred Denham. His father and I were most warmly attached friends from youth. When his son and my daughter were born it became our dearest wish to see them united. You know Sir Wilfred's father died some time ago: on his death-bed he wished me solemnly to renew my promise that, unless some great impediment arose, my child should be-

come his son's bride. I did so—I cannot break a pledge made to the dead."

"But such a promise—was your lordship right in making it? will it not be better broken than kept?" pleaded the ardent lover.

"I cannot alter my decision, or revoke my pledge. Does my daughter know of this application to me?"

"She does, my lord; she authorized it. The Lady Winifred, I am confident, knows nothing of your promise."

"No; nor do I intend her to know of it at present. I trust to your honor, Aubrey, not to reveal what has passed between us."

"I promise, my lord, but I do not renounce all hope of yet winning Lady Winifred's hand," said the youth, passionately. "I will not deceive you—she is my first and will be my only love, and it is only with life that I will resign hope."

A few more words passed, and Aubrey

left Lord Trevor's presence, and sought Winifred. He told her that the earl had rejected him, forbidding him to seek her love; but, true to his word, he did not tell her of the promise so fatal to their hopes. Soon Lord Trevor sent for his daughter, and quietly told her of Aubrey's application and his refusal.

"And the reason, papa?"

"I cannot, at present, explain, my child. Your youth is one great objection; but, Winifred, I lay my commands upon you to think no more of Aubrey as a lover or a husband. Your affections cannot be very deeply engaged. I think it more a childish fancy than any thing else. I can trust you to obey me."

The fact was Lord Trevor had an idea that young ladies were never well pleased at having husbands chosen for them: therefore he determined to say nothing to his daughter of Sir Wilfred, but to bring them together, when he was sure a mutual attachment would be the result. And Winifred as she retired soliloquized:—

"This is neither just nor right. Papa doubtless has a reason but he should at least tell me what it is."

Dear reader, I would fain be spared the task of telling how Winifred and Aubrey tried to forget each other: how she prayed and wept, and he pleaded; and then how they gradually thought less of the commands laid upon them, and met by stealth in the park and the wood. How by degrees that fatal sin of disobedience crept in, and then the love of God grew less fervent, the sacraments were less frequented and human love and human passion filled their hearts. And then the time came when Aubrey was ordered with his regiment abroad to the war, and he would not leave Winifred until she had solemnly plighted her troth to him. So solemnly and sacredly she pledged her word to become his wife, and to wed none but him; and she added a promise of secrecy at his request, until his return from the war. God help a human heart given over to the guidance of human passion.

Some months had passed since then, Christmas was approaching, but it would not be welcomed by Lady Winifred with her former joyous spirit; she was moody and listless, a betrothed bride, but a disobedient child, and the burden of her sin grew heavier as time went by. Love and remorse alternately held possession of her heart. Love said, "There is none dearer to you than Aubrey, and you are more precious to him than life: you have done right in giving him that promise." But remorse said, "You, the child of a noble race, the pride of a trusting father, have acted unworthily—you have sullied that name, and betrayed that trust by disobedience and deception."

People wondered that the gay, laughing Lady Winifred had become captious and haughty; that the scornful or hasty reply came, instead of the kind and loving word. Her interest in the well-being of others was nearly gone; she mused over her unfortunate love and her disobedi-

ence, until her own trials so filled her heart that there was no room for the griefs and woes of her fellow-creatures.

A short time before Christmas, a letter was received from Sir Wilfred Denham, asking permission on his return to England to spend a few weeks at the Hall.

"Winifred," said Lord Trevor, one morning, "I wish to speak to you here. I have received a letter from Sir Wilfred Denham. You are not acquainted with him yet: he is the son of a dear old friend of mine, and I esteem him very highly. He has been abroad from his childhood, and now, on returning home, he will come to spend the Christmas with us."

"Dear papa, I shall be glad to see any friend of yours," replied Lady Winifred, manifesting no interest in the information.

"I had better tell her at once," thought the earl, disappointed by her indifference; "she must know soon." He continued:

"You must do your best to entertain him. I think it right to apprise you that

Sir Wilfred's chief object in coming is to see yourself."

"To see me, papa? How can that be?" I do not know him; he has never seen me."

"But he has heard of you, Winnie, love," said her father, with a smile.

"Do you wish me to understand, papa, that Sir Wilfred is coming here as my lover?" asked Lady Winifred, quickly.

"I do, Winifred."

"Then, papa, I must tell you at once it is useless: I can never receive him as such."

"And why not, Winifred?"

"I cannot, and will not, papa," and the large dark eyes flashed, and the pale cheek flushed, as she rose proudly, and stood erect and haughty before her father.

"But, my love, this is nonsense," said Lord Trevor, laying his hand caressingly on her head. "You cannot dislike a man you have never seen. Tell me at least why you object to receive Sir Wilfred."

"I cannot tell you, papa."

"I will not insult you, Lady Winifred, by supposing—by supposing," repeated the earl, now speaking with stern slowness, "that other proposals, which I have forbidden you ever to think of, have anything to do with this."

Winifred did not answer. This allusion to Aubrey, blanched her cheek and lip, and left her pale as death; but with a stronger will to resist, for his dear sake.

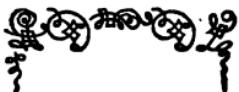
"I am awaiting your answer, Lady Winifred," continued Lord Trevor.

"I have none to give, papa, except that I never can and never will receive Sir Wilfred Denham as my suitor," replied the young lady with passionate wildness. "Oh, father," she added bursting into tears, "do not look so sternly on me."

"You can retire, Lady Winifred; only bear in mind, my word is pledged that you will become Sir Wilfred's wife, and I expect implicit obedience to my commands."

"I never will be his," was Winifred's indignant thought, as she haughtily left the room. Yet her good angel had been with her, and, as she stood there with flashing eyes, and the crimson flush of anger burning on her cheek and brow, he had whispered, "Confess all now." But pride and disobedience closed her ears, and the angel's soft whisper was not heard.

She had changed once: from a laughing, loving girl, she had become a haughty, reserved woman; and she changed again. The traces of the good angel became fainter; disobedience, once so fatally indulged, became habitual. She was moody and silent; the deep grief locked in her heart, oppressed her; she often longed to throw herself on her mother's bosom, or at her father's feet, and confess all; but the impulse was as often resisted, and the sin and the suffering went on.




 CHAPTER IV.


THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

ITH bitter grief did those loving parents behold day by day their unhappy child; that some great sorrow embittered her they plainly saw, but to all kind entreaties, to all loving words, there was the same indifferent answer. Her confidence could not be won.

The night before Christmas-eve, as Winifred was retiring to rest, Lady Trevor kissed her fondly, saying: "Winnie, darling, are you not going to confession to-morrow?"

There was a softening, for a moment, of

the calm, proud face, and a milder light in the dark eyes ; it was but for a moment, and her mother's kiss had caused it. The caress was not returned, and she answered, coldly, " I think not, mamma."

She had never been since Aubrey left England.

" Oh, Winnie ! and it is Christmas-eve."

" I know it, mamma." And there came to Winifred's mind, a picture of last Christmas-eve, before the love of her young heart was crushed, and her cup of happiness turned into a poisoned chalice. Then she was truthful, loving, loved and happy ; now she stood before her noble, gentle mother, with a dark cloud over her head and heart. Secretly pledged, against her father's wishes and commands ; her lips sealed by a vow of silence ; her mind so swayed by love and remorse, that it well nigh lost its balance. Still there arose no cry of grief or pain from that proud, stricken heart.

" Winifred, my child," and her mother's

arm was thrown around her, "tell me why you are so changed; have you a secret from me? Is your fancied dislike to Sir Wilfred Denham, whom you have not yet seen, so great, or do you prefer another? Tell me, darling, I am your truest and best friend."

The white lips moved almost convulsively, but the answer was: "I have nothing to tell, mamma."

"Oh, Winnie, my darling child—nay, do not turn from me; do not look so despairing; make me your friend and confidant. For many weeks you have neglected me; the morning and evening kiss you were accustomed to give so lovingly, has been forgotton; ah, love, do you think you give your mother's heart no pang by this strange, undutiful conduct?"

The good angel whispered again, and for a moment there was a strong impulse to throw herself into her mother's arms, and to sob out there, her love, her promise, and her misery. But there came a

vision of the old elm-tree in the park—of the dark, earnest, loving eyes bent upon her there—of two hands clasping her own as 'neath the pale moonlight, that pledge was given ; the good impulse was conquered, and the strong spirit, bruised, though not broken, rose up within her. She could not be gentle and affectionate, as formerly, towards her mother, and yet withhold her confidence ; she made no answer to that tender appeal, and Lady Trevor mournfully withdrew her arms from around the child she deemed estranged from her, and left the room with a sigh.

That same night, long after all in the mansion had retired, Winifred lay awake, watching through the weary hours. Suddenly she saw her chamber door softly opened, and Lady Trevor entered. Feigning 'sleep, Winifred closed her eyes, and did not open them nor move even when her mother passed the night-lamp over her face. Thinking her buried in a deep slumber, Lady Trevor knelt by her side.

One of her hands lay carelessly over her head; the mother took it, and covered it with kisses and tears. Then a hand was passed lovingly over her, how it lingered amid the rich raven tresses that flowed over the pillow; and gently still, fond lips were pressed upon her brow. And then, as though the strength within her gave way, Lady Trevor bent her face on her hands and wept bitterly.

"My darling one, my precious one, gone from me in heart and soul, my first-born, my loving, gentle Winnie." And from her soul to Heaven there went such a prayer as only a mother's lips can frame.

Oh! Catholic mother, whose eyes are now glancing over my page, has this ever been your lot? Have you ever seen your dearest and fairest going astray, without power to help and guide her? Have you ever seen the little one whose steps you tended, whose sunny curls have so oft been pillowled on your bosom, grown into the cold, careless, disobedient child? Have

you ever seen the little head whose aching you have soothed for many a weary hour, averted in pride or impatience of your remonstrance or control? Have you seen the soft lips you first taught to speak wreath themselves into a haughty smile at your admonitions? Have you seen the child who has cost you so much care and anxiety, and to whom you so fondly looked in your declining years for comfort and for love, have you ever seen her go astray from you, neglect you, repay your devotion with indifference, your love with contempt, your advice with ridicule or carelessness? Oh! then you know the sharpest pain this world has. Pity this poor mother in her midnight visit to this beautiful, beloved, but rebellious child.

And oh! my young Catholic sister, if perchance these words should touch your heart, if an unkind word has passed your lips, or an unkind thought dwelt in your mind ;— if you are walking in a path from which a mother's hand would fain turn you

aside, oh, pause and think, and remember the time will come when death will take that mother from you, and how will you then regret every disobedient, disrespectful word or thought.

The warm tears still lay shining on Lady Winifred's hand, the loving kiss still burned upon her brow, when her mother rose, and with a lingering look of sadness and of love, left the room. When the last sound of her footsteps had died away, when the unhappy girl was once more alone, she sprang up and threw back the long hair from her fevered brow ; she drew her shawl around her and walked to the window, but not even the frost on the cold panes could cool her hot and flushed face.

The snow-covered earth lay before her, so calm and pure, while she was so tossed with passion and grief ; her heavy eyes were raised despairingly to the clear blue sky, where shone with their holy light the golden stars ! the moonbeams silvered the trees in the park : she could see the old elm

where she had last stood with Aubrey! she looked upon her hand still damp with a sorrowing mother's tears, and she turned with a wearied sigh from the window, saying:

"Oh, that I had never seen him, or had never betrayed my father's trust!"





CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AT THE HALL.



CHRISTMAS-EVE ! Christmas-eve ! How the cry gladdens every one, and pours into every heart a rich tide of love, and joy, and pleasure. There is rest for the weary, and joy for the poor,—the hard-working, ever-toiling poor, God's own people. Have you never noticed, dear reader, how the poor love Christmas ? No matter how wretched the house, or how shabby the window, you will see a few pieces of holly stuck in the sometimes broken panes.

We left Christmas-eve in Trevor Hall,

and the gentle Lady Agnes had just fastened upon the Christmas-tree a bracelet for the beloved sister whose every thought had formerly been shared with her. Then hastening to her dressing room she found Lady Winifred preparing for the evening. It was a pretty scene, that nicely furnished dressing-room, with its bright lights and cheerful fire, and the two fair young ladies.

"Are you nearly dressed, Winnie, darling? I hear a great stir in the hall; I think Sir Wilfred Denham has arrived. The drawing-room is already half full of guests. You cannot think how the Christmas-tree is admired. Here is mamma?"

"You are ready, I perceive, my daughters," said Lady Trevor.

"Yes, mamma," replied Agnes, "only one moment longer. Clotilde, fasten this spray better in my hair, and arrange this lace. That will do. Now, mamma, shall we please papa? He said he should expect an exquisite toilet to-night. We do

not look much like sisters, though, do we?" And the bright young speaker threw her arm around her stately sister, and stood with a mischievous, though half deferential, smile before Lady Trevor.

The mother's fond heart beat with pride as she gazed on her two lovely daughters. A contrast they were even in their beauty. A rich black velvet dress revealed Winifred's white neck and arms, making them look doubly fair; it added to her stateliness, too, it fell around her in such graceful folds. The white lace waved like a soft cloud, and the black tresses were interwoven with soft gleaming pearls. The fever flush of excitement burned on her cheek, and lit her dark, flashing eyes, and made her look more beautiful than ever. For a specimen of aristocratic, courtly loveliness, Lady Winifred would have stood foremost among the most noble. Agnes wore a dress of pale blue satin, the delicate tint and rich laces making the pure complexion more than ever fair. A

wreath of starry jessamine with silver leaves was twined around the golden curls that fell in such luxuriant profusion. Her deep blue eyes were fairly dancing with joy, and Lady Trevor smiled brightly as she looked upon the fairy creature. Agnes and her sister reminded the spectator—one of a graceful, delicate lily, the other of a beautiful queenly rose.

"We await your decision, mamma; we are quite ready to go."

"Your papa wishes to introduce you to Sir Wilfred before you go into the drawing-room. I will let him know you are waiting for him."

"Now, papa, pray do not detain us long," said Lady Agnes, gaily, as her father appeared. "I am impatient to go into the drawing-room."

The earl looked very proud of his two peerless daughters, as he presented them to Sir Wilfred. A frank smile of kindly welcome played round the lips of Lady Agnes as she placed her hand in his, but

to Winifred's mind there arose the scornful thought, "And they would have me renounce Aubrey for him!" Her words were as cold as her looks, and poor Sir Wilfred was almost frozen. They adjourned to the drawing-room, where an admiring group was surrounding the tree. The young baronet soon approached Winifred, saying, "I must congratulate your ladyship upon the exquisite result of your taste; the tree is most beautifully decorated."

"I am glad you are pleased to admire it," was the indifferent reply.

"I do, indeed. I consider a Christmas-tree the most pleasing of all Christmas customs."

"I quite agree in that opinion," rejoined Lady Winifred as icily as ever."

Sir Wilfred, confused and disappointed by the demeanor of his pledged bride, waited some further observation, but none came. I must try something else, thought he, and began in desperation.

"I so much admired the scenery as I rode up to the Hall: nothing could look finer than the grand old park, covered with snow. I really think winter desolation is preferable to summer glory."

"We admire each season in its turn, each has its own charm," was the sententious answer.

The baronet sighed. He could not find a sunbeam to melt the snow.

"Do you hear much of the war?" he began again. Ah, that was a dangerous topic, Sir Wilfred, only you did not know it.

"Not very much," replied Lady Winifred.

"Perhaps you know Col. Aubrey Howard? His father's place is somewhere in this neighborhood; I think he went out with his regiment, some time since."

Fortunately, Sir Wilfred was not looking at his companion, or he would have seen the rich crimson gone, and the fair face deadly pale.

"His regiment greatly distinguished themselves, I hear," he continued.

"And he?" Winifred asked in a low, quiet tone, though her eyes dilated with a wild fire.

"He is promoted, and covered with military honors."

The despairing, defiant look passed from her face; it was so strange to hear *his* name again, and from such a source. She looked up, observingly, for the first time at her companion. He was not a handsome man, but there was something noble and candid in his face; he looked what he really was, frank, affectionate, and simple-hearted. His eyes were fixed upon Lady Agnes, whose sunny face was glowing with smiles and laughter.

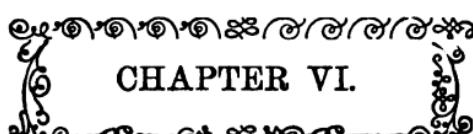
"I never saw any one so beautiful as your sister," he said, suddenly; then blushed at his own simplicity.

Winifred; smiled she thought it such a novel way of making love to herself; and the smile made her look so radiant, that her father, in delighted surprise, crossed the room to join her. He thought Sir

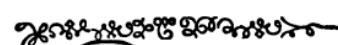
Wilfred was making wonderful progress : he little knew that the light upon that beautiful face was caused by hearing of Aubrey's success, and her sister's praises.

Soon after, the yule log was brought in, and all sat round the hearth. Lord Trevor read a Christmas legend, another gentleman told a Christmas story of a haunted house ; so in quiet enjoyment they watched the yule log burn, until they heard the Christmas singers outside. And then there was a hush in the room, as the sweet old Christmas carols floated on the air, and found their way into every heart, making sweet music there. Then rang out, in the clear, cold, frosty air, the bell for midnight Mass. "Christ is born," it seemed to say, "come and adore Him."





CHAPTER VI.



THE MIDNIGHT MASS

HE distance was so short from the hall to the church, and the night so beautiful, the whole party determined to walk. Sir Wilfred, whose eyes had seldom wandered from the fair Agnes, escorted her and Lady Trevor. Their road lay through the broad lawn, where the snow lay thick upon the ground, and through a short path in the woods, where it hung upon the leafless trees. The whole world looked bright and sparkling as the moonbeams fell upon the snow; the stars shone brightly, and the earth seemed full of gladness and joy. The

church door stood open, as though inviting one to enter and worship the new-born Babe.

And oh, how beautiful it was ! How the holly and the fir were twined in great masses around the pictures and the cross, and how the laurel hung in great arches over the ceiling and the walls. No white was seen ; all was green, bright, fresh and beautiful. The altar, with its green wreaths, its Christmas roses, and its bright tapers, looked most glorious ; but the most beautiful thing of all, was the crib. In a small grove of fir, this crib was placed, and in it, Joseph and Mary, with the Holy Infant. True to nature was the blue sky, the white earth, the few leafless trees, the poor stable, with the manger and the ox. True to life was the holy St. Joseph, with his kind saintly face, and venerable figure; truer still, was our gracious Lady, in all the glory of her beauty, so meek, so humble, and yet so dignified and calm. But truest yet was that sweet Babe of Bethlehem,

with His loving smile, tender eyes, and outstretched hands. It must be a heart of iron that could refuse homage there.

Oh, that midnight Mass, with its pealing music, its fragrant incense, and its thousand lights! *Gloria in excelsis* sang the choir, and the angels caught up the cry, and *Gloria* rang through earth, and air, and heaven. *Gloria* rose from thousands of human hearts, and lingered with a sweet sound on loving lips. *Gloria* rose from the bright angels, from the tuneful seraphim, and round God's holy throne, the sounds floated like a rose-cloud resting on gold. Then, that hymn, so dear to all Catholics, rang through the world, the *Adeste*.

Ah! reader, you heard that hymn when you were a little child, pure and sinless as one of the angels joining in it; you hear it now when old and worn in the world's ways, and it brings to your heart a crowd of good and holy recollections, so full of the freshness of your youth, that you can only bow your head and weep.

You may, perhaps, have kept your childish, loving faith as a precious jewel; you may have followed its dictates, and lived by its rules; if so, rejoice, and join with a thankful heart in that sweet music. You may have lost, neglected, or spurned your faith: believed, but not practised it; you may have served God with a cold, worldly heart; oh, if so, as the thought of your happy childhood comes back, by all the beautiful memories, kneeling before that Christmas altar, give your heart and soul again to God.

And Lady Winifred—her father's anxious brow, her mother's sad tears, her sister's loving prayers, had not power to move that heart; they had but bound its icy chains tighter; but as the sweet old chant came pealing on her ears, as she knelt before that radiant altar as she watched the tender Mother and the gentle Babe, her proud heart softened, and when the last *Venite adoremus* was sung in a low, melodious, thrilling voice, she bowed down, and

the stubborn will, the icy fountains gave way at last. Disobedience, pride and love were conquered. There was an irrepressible longing for the old happy peace of her girlhood, for a clear conscience, and a quiet heart.

“*Sanctus sanctus,*” sang the angels, and *sanctus* chanted the choir, and with a glorious burst of melody, rang out the *Hosanna*. Then the church was hushed, the incense rose in fragrant clouds over the altar, until the tapers shone through its mist-like stars. Lower and lower the people bend, warmer and more loving each heart glows. The Mystery of all mysteries is accomplished, and then softly floating round like the echo of a distant band of angels, the solemn *Agnus Dei* fills every soul.

The glorious midnight Mass was ended; but still the Lady Winifred knelt, and prayed, and wept. They waited, but she did not move until her sister gently reminded her Lord Trevor was standing in

the aisle, awaiting her. With her veil tightly drawn, she left the church. Sir Wilfred again joined Lady Trevor, and Agnes. Winifred lightly touched her father's arm and said:

"Papa, may I speak to you now, before we enter the hall?"

"Certainly, my love, but will you not wait? We shall be at home in another moment."

"Oh, papa, let me tell you now, now—while my heart is still full of that beautiful Mass, and I feel humble and contrite. Turn down this path, I will not keep you long; but do not hate—do not despise me when I confess what I have done."

"Hate you, Winifred! You are still my child, no matter what you may have done."

"Bless you, dearest papa, for saying that, but I have betrayed your trust, disobeyed your commands, I have deceived you, and while you thought me good and true, I have been false and wicked."

Her voice trembled, and her lips quivered, but she went bravely on.

"Papa, I have met Aubrey Howard, unknown to you, unknown to any one. I met him, and plighted my faith to him. I vowed to become his wife, and promised never to reveal, until after his return, what I have told you. Now, papa," and the proud figure drooped and bent before him, "tell me the worst, do you not hate me?"

"My poor child, my darling Winifred, how you have suffered," Lord Trevor said, his eyes filling with tears. The sight of that pale, anguished face, disarmed his anger.

"I have suffered, papa, I have longed all day for night to come, that I might be alone, for I felt your presence killing me, and all night I have longed for day, that I might lose my own thoughts. I wished to tell you, but I dared not; what can I, what shall I do?"

"Come home, now, Winifred, God bless you that you have told me this. Why,

you are as white as the snow almost; let us hasten home."

They did so, Lord Trevor supporting his daughter who trembled violently. At the entrance, she paused once more.

"But, papa, you have not yet told me what I must do."

"Wait patiently, my child, leave all to God; let His will guide you, and pray that you may know it."

They entered the hall. "Kiss me, and bless me, father, before I leave you; and oh! say that you forgive me. I will never again disobey you, my kind, good papa; I will do all you wish."

When Winifred was in her own room, Lady Trevor came to her at her request, and then, kneeling at that dear mother's side, her face buried in her hands, she confessed her fault, and gave that confidence she had so ungratefully refused. That was a happy hour to both. Tenderly did Lady Trevor assure her child of her love and sympathy, and encourage her to put aside

all perplexity and discouraging thoughts, and trust the issue of her trouble to God.

There was peace in Winifred's heart that night. True, there was a sorrowful, yearning love, but there was no deceit, no disobedience; all was confessed and forgiven. Long before the inmates of the mansion were aroused, Winifred was again before the altar, preparing for confession. At the early Mass, Lord and Lady Trevor, with most of their guests attended, and knelt together before the holy altar, to receive with loving hearts the Babe of Bethlehem.

Then home once more with light, joyous hearts; and if you could have been in the breakfast-room where they all assembled, and have heard the Christmas congratulations, you would never forget the scene. A "Merry Christmas" went all around, and Christmas gifts were exchanged. Then came the grand High Mass, with all the pomp and solemnity zealous hearts and means could bring to the worship of the new-born child.

Then the Christmas dinner, roast-beef and turkeys led the dance: plum-puddings and mince-pies followed; grapes and pears figured, as they always do, largely. Christmas afternoon was given to singing and music, and after Vespers and Benediction came Christmas games and stories.

Bright good English cheer, and Christmas in good old English style was kept there through successive days. And amidst all, Lady Winifred moved with some semblance of her former demeanor, and Lady Agnes danced and sang, her sunny face brightening every place she entered, and constant as her shadow followed Sir Wilfred Denham.





CHAPTER VII.

A HAPPY TERMINATION.



MUST introduce you formally, kind reader, to Sir Wilfred's apartment at Trevor Hall. It was a fine large room, hung round with rich tapestry and silk hangings. A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth, and a bright lamp burned on the table. An easy chair stood before the fire, and in this chair sat the good young baronet. It wanted an hour until dinner, and he had retired to think, solely because it was impossible for him to think in any other room in the house; for Lady Agnes was sure to come dancing in like a sun-

beam, and then, no matter how many ideas he had collected, they were all scattered to the winds, and he had to begin them again only to lose them once more.

Sir Wilfred's thoughts, then, arranged in proper order, were something like the following ; in fact his soliloquy was made partly aloud :

" Well—the thing is plain enough—I am in love with the wrong lady. Here I am, pledged by two fathers, to marry Lady Winifred, and she very plainly does not care much for me; while that glorious Agnes, with her bright eyes and saucy smile, is a thousand times kinder. Lady Winifred is too grand for me; altogether too much in the magnificent style, although she is much more gracious than I had ventured to expect, after her chilling reception. Lady Agnes is a sunbeam. I wonder if those two fathers mentioned any name in the particulars, because if they only said, ' my son,' and ' my daughter,' I may as well be happy with Agnes, as mis-

erable with Winifred. She is a splendid lady, though—but Agnes! I will try."

Lord Trevor looked rather surprised when, that same evening, Sir Wilfred asked for a private interview: and he was still more surprised, on going to the library, where he had requested the baronet to attend, to meet the Lady Agnes trying to escape before he reached the door; and when he caught her hand, to see how she blushed and stammered, and ran away.

His surprise reached a climax, when he heard from Sir Wilfred, a declaration of his passion for Agnes, and his conviction that Winifred and himself were dissimilar in every way.

"I shall love and esteem the Lady Winifred very highly, as a sister, I am sure, my lord," was the conclusion of the young baronet's long, eloquent and persuasive speech.

Nothing remained for Lord Trevor, but to give his consent, which he ultimately did, but not without a deal of sage reflec-

tion on the caprices of the sex in general, and of his own two daughters in particular. It may be assumed as an undoubted fact, that the happiness of the youthful lovers at this consummation, was scarcely greater than Winifred's. Lady Trevor was in every respect pleased with the turn affairs had taken—the father said little, but perhaps his satisfaction was almost as great. His pledge to his deceased friend would be redeemed, and not at the sacrifice of his wayward daughter's wishes.

And when the war was over, Aubrey Howard returned home so honored, and fêted, and courted, that the earl was obliged to honor him as one of the heroes of the day, and his former objection to Aubrey's suit being no longer in force, had none other to advance. The next Christmas-time saw a double wedding at Trevor. Sir Wilfred looked the picture of bliss with his bride the fairy-like Lady Agnes; and Aubrey, whose handsome, manly face looked darker with the sun of a warmer

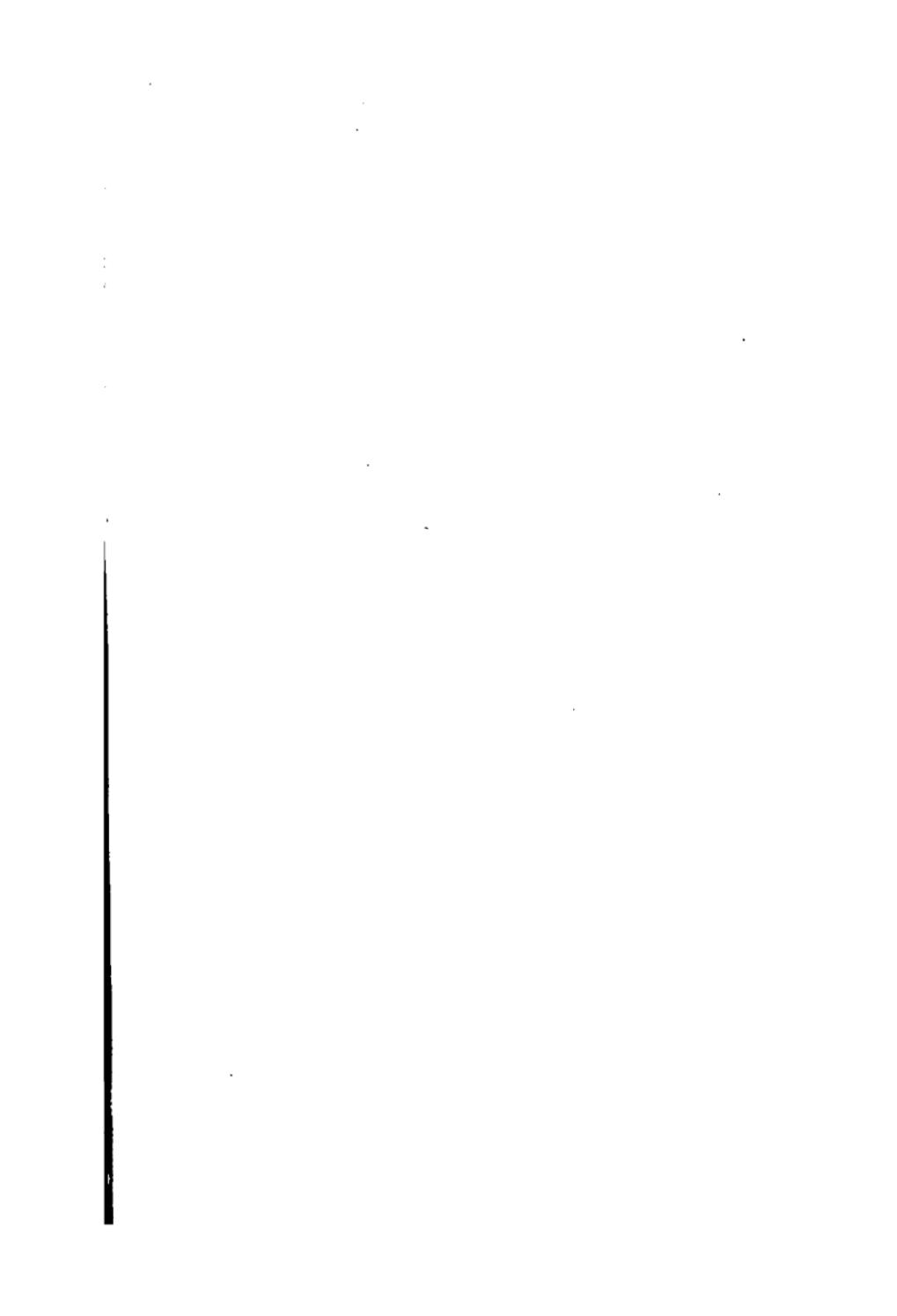
clime, thought nothing had ever been seen so peerlessly beautiful as his own faithful Winifred. From her heart ascended, night and day, a cry of thanksgiving that she had been spared some of the consequences of disobedience—that her present happiness was unalloyed and blessed beyond what she had dared to hope.

And so, dear reader, amidst a shower of bride-cake, wedding favors and orange-blossoms, I take my leave, wishing you, with all my heart, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.



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W.H. 10 1946



